

2013 Golden Jubilee edition

BIHAR YOGA®

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Karma Yoga Book 3

SAMSARA

*From the teachings of
two great luminaries of the 20th century*

Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati
Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Karma Yoga Book 3

SAMSARA



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*From the teachings of
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*Including answers from the satsangs of
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



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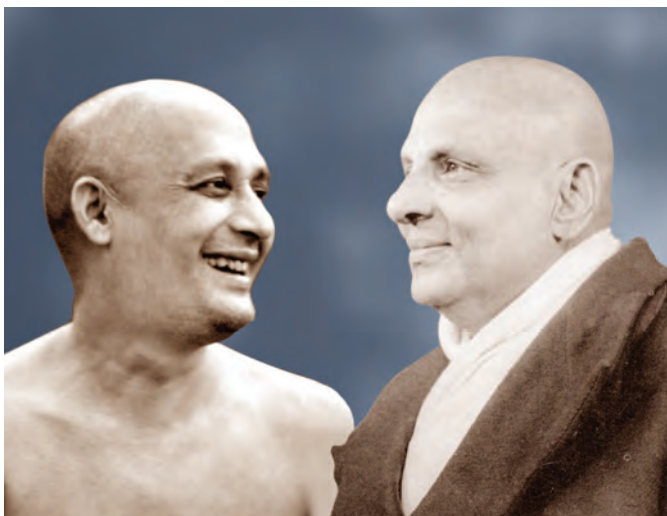
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga
and to our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our spiritual journey.*

Swami Niranjan

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Preface

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Conversations on the Science of Yoga is an encyclopaedic series which brings together the collected teachings of two generations of masters – Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh and Swami Satyananda Saraswati of Munger. Satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati on his numerous national and international tours also provide the answers to many questions on this vast subject. These luminaries represent a living tradition in which the eternal knowledge and wisdom of yoga has been passed from guru to disciple in a dynamic continuum from the early twentieth century to the first decades of the twenty-first century.

The series consists of sets of books which present the vast, timeless culture of yoga topic by topic, in question and answer format. In this way, complex and profound subjects such as karma yoga, hatha yoga and bhakti yoga, are presented in clear, simple language. These conversations on yoga reflect an ancient and enduring approach to the transmission of wisdom, in which spiritual aspirants seek answers to their questions at the feet of the guru.

Many of the answers also include verses from the various relevant scriptures, connecting the modern experience with the classical tradition. It is through the lives and teachings of the masters that the scriptures are correctly and intuitively

interpreted for each generation, ensuring that the light of these revelations continues to illumine and inspire the hearts and minds of all who aspire for spiritual upliftment.

Conversations on the Science of Yoga has been compiled from the rich archive of satsangs and writings, both published and unpublished, which is held at the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger. The organization of this material into the major branches of yoga and related topics creates a unique interpretation of the classical yogic sciences for the benefit of humanity in the modern era. Deeply founded in tradition, the teachings are both systematic and practical, addressing the needs of individuals and society at a time when adjustment to constant change is placing unprecedented pressure on people all over the world.

The Bihar Yoga tradition

Bihar School of Yoga is ideally placed to produce this major contribution to yogic literature. Founded in 1963 by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, the system known in India as Bihar Yoga and internationally as Satyananda Yoga, seamlessly integrates all facets of the yogic tradition, including the various branches of yoga, the philosophies which are fundamental to the yogic culture and the dynamism of self-

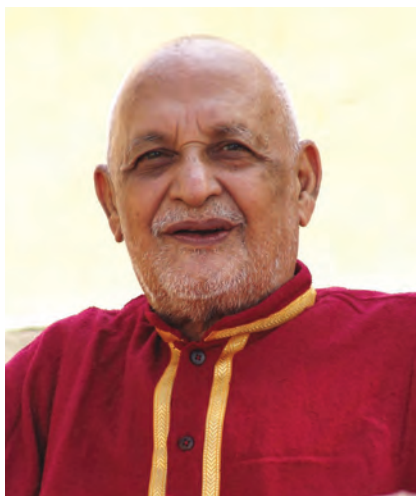


realized preceptors which ensures that the teachings remain fresh and relevant in any age. This all-inclusive approach means that yogic practices are available as tools for holistic life management, while other *vidyas*, spiritual sciences, such as Tantra, Vedanta and Samkhya provide a broad philosophical base. Emerging from this living tradition, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga* is a unique and precious offering to humanity.



Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963)

Swami Sivananda was a towering spiritual force in the yogic renaissance which developed in India in the first half of the twentieth century. After serving as a doctor in Malaya, he returned to India to pursue his spiritual aspirations, and in 1924 was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in Rishikesh. He founded the Divine Life Society, toured India extensively, wrote hundreds of books and inspired thousands around the world to practise yoga and lead a divine life. Swami Sivananda's eightfold path of yoga – serve, love, give, purify, do good, be good, meditate, realize – expresses his philosophy of service to humanity and continues to guide the work of the Bihar School of Yoga.



Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1923–2009)

Swami Satyananda was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa by his guru Swami Sivananda, in 1947. After serving his guru's mission in Rishikesh for twelve years, he founded the International Yoga Fellowship in 1956 and the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. From that base he took the teachings to the rest of the world, fulfilling the mandate of his guru to 'spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore.'

Through his genius and compassion, many ancient, complex and esoteric practices were systematized, simplified and made available to people of all ages, cultures and creeds. Swami Satyananda's blend of charisma and pragmatism attracted multitudes of devotees wherever he went, giving rise to a global movement and creating a far-reaching network of ashrams, yoga centres and teachers. Meanwhile, the headquarters in Bihar continued to expand its many programs, including the publishing division, producing numerous books that both preserve and disseminate the incredibly rich seam of practical wisdom which flows through this lineage.

In 1988 Swami Satyananda renounced his mission in order to live as a paramahansa sannyasin, performing higher

spiritual and vedic sadhanas in an isolated location. During this chapter of his life, he also realized his guru's teaching of 'serve, love, give', by establishing Sivananda Math, an organization dedicated to raising the living standards of the weaker and underprivileged sectors of society.

At midnight on 5 December 2009, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati attained mahasamadhi.



Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati (1960)

A yogi from earliest childhood, Swami Niranjanananda joined the Bihar School of Yoga in 1964 and was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in 1971. At the age of eleven he was sent to live abroad by his guru Swami Satyananda, giving him direct experience and understanding of people from a vast array of cultures and walks of life. These years instilled in him a rare, cross-cultural insight into human nature, enabling him to communicate and interact with the international community with familiarity, ease and humour.

Combined with his depth of spiritual and yogic knowledge, this background equipped Swami Niranjanananda to guide the Bihar School of Yoga and the international yoga movement from 1983 until 2008, when he began handing

over the administration to the next generation. During this time he also authored many classic books on yoga, tantra and the upanishads and founded Bihar Yoga Bharati, the world's first yoga university, while continuing extensive national and international touring.

Following retirement from his role at the Bihar School of Yoga, Swami Niranjanananda established Sannyasa Peeth for the development and training of sannyasins, and for his own pursuit of the higher sadhanas of sannyasa.

As the spiritual successor to Swami Satyananda, Swami Niranjanananda continues to inspire aspirants around the world.



Yoga is not a philosophy, it is a practical science. Philosophy gives you knowledge, yoga gives you experience. This is the beauty of yoga. That experience is a manifestation of your inner being.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Introduction

Death is the most common phenomenon in nature and yet the least understood. Philosophy originates from the phenomenon of death. Philosophy is really a study of death.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

It is said in the spiritual traditions that life is preparation for death. The opposite attitude is seen in materialistic belief systems in which death represents the ultimate loss. The great question mark punctuating the after-death state has always filed the topic of death clearly in the philosophy and religion folder. What happens after death is forever unknown and therefore brimming with possibilities - as such it is the domain of thinkers, of mystics, of revelation and ritual. In the words of Swami Niranjanananda, “The unknown is on both sides of birth and death; after death is the experience of the unknown and before birth also is the experience of the unknown.” The human mind plays endlessly with this situation, responding in a multitude of ways to the process of dying, the experience of the spirit after death, and the relationship of the living with the dead.

Fear of death

In raja yoga, Sage Patanjali identifies fear of death as one of the five *kleshas*, or afflictions which cause human suffering.

The fear of death is often expressed by clinging to life, a theme that has persisted across the ages in the quest for eternal youth. In modern times medical science has become increasingly caught up in this klesha. Cosmetic surgery is now commonly used to hide the evidence of ageing, while drugs and other forms of medical intervention are used to prolong life. This continues, even when the physical state leaves one dependent on others for basic needs and the quality of life declines significantly. The terminally ill or injured may be kept indefinitely alive by life support systems and some people even arrange to have their body preserved, hoping that science will find a way of restoring life. Ongoing medical developments are causing much thinking and social debate about the issue; for example, people are starting to face the possibility of extended old age, with all its attendant emotional, economic and social consequences. The question is being asked, is this what we really want?

In the West there has been a concurrent decline in religious observance. Consequently the beliefs and rituals that supported the process of death and dying have been lost by many. The undertaker is called rather than the priest, the clinical chapels of funeral parlours are replacing churches, and homogenous lawn cemeteries are taking the place of graveyards. In this brave new world, the subject is hidden and avoided, dying has become a medical procedure and death is taken care of by business people. Modernity is taking the soul out of death. By contrast, the thoughts and wisdom in *Samsara* are rich with profound beauty and eternal meaning. The need for this knowledge has never been greater. In a world obsessed by economics and scientific validation, the quest for understanding the deeply spiritual events of birth and death needs to be returned to those whose vision and knowledge are transcendental. In *Samsara*, three self-realized masters, Swami Sivananda, Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjanananda, answer questions about these mysteries with grace and insight, providing comfort and giving courage amidst the confusion and denial that is prevalent in secular society.

Rites of passage

The observation of rites of passage during transitions through life's various stages is universal in traditional cultures. The ceremonies and rituals are many and varied, but they all acknowledge that life is sacred and that times of change need the grace of a higher power to smooth the way. This deep social wisdom is being replaced in spiritually impoverished societies by expensive counselling sessions and seminars on change management. By contrast, traditional systems were community based and steeped in cultural expression. Swami Satyananda puts it in terms everyone can understand, "When somebody dies one must sing and dance, because one is responsible for the atmosphere all around." Prayer, chanting, song, dance, gathering, symbolism, worship, celebration, giving, feasting and fasting are all used to mark times of transition.

In *Samsara*, the Indian rituals surrounding dying and death are described. Their role for both the living and the departed is explained. Swami Niranjanananda tells us, "Thirteen days after the death, the ritual of shraaddha is performed. Shraaddha means the showing of gratitude to the departed person in order to help his spirit overcome the attachments of family and desire."

Belief in the continuity of the spirit is inherent in all such rituals. If the spirit continues, where does it dwell? What about heaven and hell? Are there other dimensions of existence? According to the yogic culture, there *are* other planes of existence, known as *lokas*. Remarkable detail about these lokas, and about the stages the spirit goes through on its journey towards eventual liberation from the cycle of birth and death is revealed in *Samsara*. According to Swami Satyananda, "Life is continuous and eternal; death is only a full stop before the next sentence."

The scriptures are an essential source on these fields of knowledge which are beyond mundane knowing. *Bhagavad Gita*, *Manusmriti*, *Ramayana*, *Yoga Vasishtha* and others summon the voice of the ancients into the twenty-first

century, reminding us that a continuum of wisdom is part of the human heritage, regardless of time and place. The *Ramayana* (Ayodhyakanda, 23:16) speaks directly about fate and effort:

He who is cowardly and powerless trusts in fate. The valiant, who are possessed of a strong mind, never seek shelter in fate.

Grace divine

Having delved thoroughly into these eternal mysteries of the soul, one is left wondering about the descent of grace as we traverse the lifetimes on the earthly plane. Are we alone, is it all dependent on individual effort and will? Or can the most subtle of experiences, that of divine grace, be a reality in anyone's life? These questions about the intersection of human effort and divine grace are answered in the final chapter of *Samsara*, bringing this vast topic to a gentle conclusion. Swami Sivananda tells us that, "Human effort and divine grace are interconnected," that each attracts the other. Swami Niranjanananda brings a fresh angle to the same idea, "Once excellence comes into life, once life is infused with positive qualities, positive thoughts, actions and behaviour, one becomes the recipient of God's grace." And Swami Satyananda speaks personally of his life and how he came to the conclusion that, "Nothing happens without God's grace. Whatever I received was through God's grace, not my own. God's grace is required. You need His grace, and in order to receive His grace, you have to be innocent, like a child."

1

Understanding Death

WHAT IS DEATH?

Is death the end?

Swami Sivananda: Death is only a phase of life, not the opposite of life. Life follows on ceaselessly. The fruit perishes, but the seed is full of life. The seed dies, but a huge tree grows out of it. The tree perishes and becomes coal, which has a rich life. Water disappears into the earth and becomes an invisible stream, which contains the seed of new life. The stone disappears, but it becomes lime, which is full of new life. Death is only a change of form, a change of body. Only the physical sheath is thrown away: life persists.

ODE TO DEATH

*O Death! O Lord Yama! Goodbye unto Thee
Thou art administering the laws of Ishwara.
All fall a prey to Thee,
All come into Thy jaws.*

*Thou art Time,
Thou art Dharmaraja,
O! Omniscient Kala (Time),
Thou art the dispenser of the Law.*

*Thou art acquainted
With the three periods of time;
Thou once initiated Nachiketas
Into the mysteries of Atman or Brahma Vidya.*

*I have transcended Time and Death,
I am Eternity.
Where is Time in Eternity?
Time is a mental creation.*

*I have transcended mind,
I am not afraid of Death.
I am beyond Thy reach now,
I bid Thee farewell now.*

*I am grateful for all Thy kind acts.
Salutations unto Thee, O Lord Yama!
I wish to attain videhamukti now,
I will merge in the Supreme Self.*

How does philosophy originate?

Swami Sivananda: The idea of death has always been the strongest motive of religion and religious life. People do not want to die, they want to live forever. This is the starting point of philosophy, which enquires and investigates. The innate question of all people is: what remains after death? What becomes of the soul after the death of the body? Where does the soul go? Does it still exist? These questions arise spontaneously in the minds of everyone. They are momentous questions, which touch the heart deeply.

The same questions arise today in people of all countries, just as they arose thousands of years ago. Death is the most common phenomenon in nature and yet the least understood. The question of death is one of the most difficult problems of philosophy because there is no direct evidence available as to what really happens in and after death. Philosophy originates from the phenomenon of death. Philosophy is really a study of death.

What is death?

Swami Satyananda: Death is not destruction, but an entry into another state of experience. Just as one sleeps and dreams, in the same way one dies. The only difference is that in death the spirit leaves the body. Sri Krishna's vivid image describing reincarnation brings dramatic simplicity to relieve our confusion. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:22):

*Vaasaamsi jeernaani yathaa vihaaya navaani grihnaati
naro'paraani;
Tathaa shareeraani vihaaya jeernaa-nyanyaani samyaati
navaani dehee.*

Just as a man casts off worn-out clothes and puts on new ones, so also the embodied Self casts off worn-out bodies and enters others that are new.

Death is a natural incident in the course of physical existence when it becomes unfit for further activities and use. Death is necessary for evolution.

Why don't people remember the imminence of death?

Swami Sivananda: A person has not sprung up all of a sudden as a person. Right from the beginning, when the jiva was first ushered into the world, it has continuously undergone the cycles of birth and death, not in tens, hundreds or thousands, but in hundreds of thousands. The soul carries with it the samskaras right from its first birth up to the current birth. The not yet enjoyed or residual samskaras remain until they are completely fried by *atmajnana*, knowledge of the self.

Although people see countless deaths daily, the forgetfulness of death prevents them from seeing the face of truth. The experiences a person has gained are insufficient to drag his attention towards the eternal truth, which is God. However, the day will certainly dawn in the life of every individual, although not necessarily in this birth, when he will tune in to the ultimate truth by gradual evolution, some rare merit, satsang with mahatmas, devotion to guru or God's grace.

The sinful deeds which men commit are mainly due to ignorance. When ignorance vanishes once and for all by the performance of good and selfless deeds, *japa* and *swadhyaya*, or the grace of guru, the final goal will ever remain in view. The commission of vicious deeds indicates that the *jiva* is not yet evolved and needs to gain more experiences of the world and undergo repeated and continual refinement. For the removal of ignorance and firm remembrance of God, there is no way more powerful than to encounter the kicks, blows and knocks of the world that greet one unaware.

What is the significance of death?

Swami Satyananda: Every human being is born with certain *karmas* to fulfil, that is to say, one has come under deputation. Once the period of deputation is completed, the body ceases to function. Therefore, death is an exit, not the end. Just as one leaves one room and enters another, the individual self moves from one body to another. The *karmas* are endless, and the chain of *karma* is a long chain. This life is nothing but the play of *karma*. One has sown what one is reaping, one is sowing what one shall reap. Life is continuous and eternal; death is only a full stop before the next sentence. The physical body does not represent the whole truth of creation. Besides the body, there is *buddhi*, *chitta*, *ahamkara* and *atman*, the spirit, which represents the totality of truth and existence.

How does the process of evolution show that death is not destruction?

Swami Satyananda: Evolution is a constant, slow motion. One motion mingles with another – it is not a change. The physical body has been evolving right from childhood in such a way that one does not see it. Evolution relates to transformation, transition and metamorphosis, so there is no death in evolution. If death were considered to be destruction, the philosophy or theory of evolution would be false. There would be no evolution. But there is evolution.

Nature is evolving, mind and emotions are evolving. Everything is in motion. Therefore, death is just an exit, a point where evolution enters another phase.

If God is all compassionate, why did He create death?

Swami Sivananda: Occasionally in moments of calm contemplation when one is thrown into an introspective mood, one sometimes wonders why God, who is such a kind, compassionate and merciful Father, included death in the scheme of life. The fact is, death comes as a necessity to egg one on in one's evolution. Who could imagine a world where there would be no death? Overpopulation poses a difficult problem even today with all the deaths that take their normal course. The chaos and confusion that would result if there were no deaths is unimaginable.

Life would no longer be worth living. It would become a dull, drab drudgery. Living forever in the same body one could not grow beyond one's bonds and ties of attachments. Complete separation is necessary to make one cautious of one's attachments. During the brief sojourn in this world, one becomes so attached to this terra firma that when death knocks at the door, one feels reluctant to be torn from the family surroundings and leave the material possessions so painstakingly created. Therefore, death is the only solution to completely snap the tie of attachment.

Death is not only a necessity for those who die, but it is also necessary for the evolution of those who are left behind. Death means responsibilities must be taken on new shoulders. Such individuals accept the challenge of life and grow in experience. A father suddenly passes away, so the son takes up the new responsibility, bears it and enriches his treasure-house of experience. When a child dies in infancy, it may not be much of an experience for him, except for certain karmic purgation, but for those who are left behind it means all the more. One has to grow beyond attachment, ego and desire to enjoy immunity from sufferings. Death plays an indispensable role by helping one to transcend worldly attachments.

The individual soul could never grow without death. The evolutionary process is a long one and requires various experiences of poverty and riches, purity and pollution, ignorance and education, of every country, clime, culture, race and religion. It requires experience of both sexes as well. In a single body it is not possible to assimilate all these. Therefore, by virtue of necessity one dies and is born again under different circumstances for a different set of experiences. The assimilation of experiences is not possible without death. In the post-mortem states the consciousness widens. The deeds of the past lifetime have a reaction, and one learns many new lessons. Monkeys often devour food rapidly and then masticate at their leisure. Similarly, one masticates one's experiences in a higher and wider light which shines after death.

What is the difference between death and sleep?

Swami Niranjanananda: Death is a simple and clean state. It is actually the withdrawal of energy from the body. One has the experience of sleep at night. When one goes to sleep, gradually the mind withdraws from all directions, becomes drowsy, and suddenly there is nothing, there is absence of every association. The externalized tentacles of the mind come back to the source. That happens in sleep.

Similarly, the dynamic and active pranas in the body are responsible for the maintenance of this physiological and psychological structure, called a human being. When their activity and intensity reduces and they withdraw, the withdrawal of prana indicates the state of death. In sleep, the mind withdraws, the prana remains active. In death, both the mind and prana withdraw. There is no control over the withdrawal of prana.

Yogis have been able to maintain some control over this process. One hears of yogis who leave their bodies in the state of samadhi, who die in samadhi. What happens then? In the state of voluntary death, the yogis wilfully withdraw the energy, the prana shakti.

Sleep is like an experience of death. When one sleeps for eight to twelve hours one calls it 'sleep', but when one sleeps for a long, long time, that is known as 'eternal sleep', but nevertheless it is sleep.

When one sleeps there is no perception, no idea of time, space and object. The consciousness or the conscious faculties are completely disassociated from the senses and mind. There are no sensory experiences going into the mind at the time of sleep. If there are any sensory experiences, they happen at a subtle level, not at the conscious level. There is no understanding or concept of time when one sleeps. During the day one is aware of every moment, but in sleep eight hours go by without knowing. The idea of space and object disappear and dissolve in the state of sleep, which means that the life-force is disconnected from the senses and the mind, from the instruments which give understanding and awareness of the environment and body.

The absence of the conscious faculty from the senses and the mind is known as death. It happens every night, and what one experiences in the form of sleep is a 'mini-death' where one is not in control of oneself.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEATH

Why is death necessary?

Swami Satyananda: If old people were to survive for five hundred years, they would not enjoy life at all. Enjoyment belongs to the young, not to the old. It is necessary that old people die. When a person no longer finds any pleasure in life, it is time to die. There is no point in living life without any pleasure. Death is a must, as is birth. The definition of death has to change. No matter who dies in the family, it is no loss to anybody. Death is the karma of nature. Prakriti has a rule that what is born must also perish.

If a person thinks that his near and dear ones should not die, or that he should not die, he is deluded! Imagine a world or a family where nobody dies! Eventually everyone

would stop loving each other. People would live together but they would not love each other. How can people love one another for so many years? It is so difficult. One gets tired of eating the same rasagula every day for lunch. One does not want rasagula every day, some days gulab jamun and some days pedda. People live together and are attached to each other. Therefore, they fail to realize the vision of reality.

Once there was a lady whose son had died, and she was unhappy. She refused to abandon the dead body of her son and went to everybody asking, "Please bring life back to my child." She went to the doctors, priests, healers and magicians, and begged them to give life back to him. Then someone directed her to Lord Buddha. So she went to him and begged him to give life to her son. Buddha smiled at her and said, "Yes, but first I need a handful of rice from a family where nobody has died."

The lady went to the first house, asked for a handful of rice and was given it gladly. Then she asked, "Has anyone in your family died?" The woman of the house replied, "Yes, of course." Thus, the bereaved mother went from house to house, and at each one she was told that someone in the family had died. It was late in the evening and she was tired. So she returned to Buddha and said, "Sir, I could not get that handful of rice." He asked her, "Why?" She said, "Because I did not find any house where death had not taken place." Then Buddha smiled and said, "You want to be an exception?"

Death comes as a necessary backdrop between two births inasmuch as the activities go on behind the curtain. After the assimilation of a set of experiences from one life, the individual soul is provided with a new set of mental, emotional and pranic bodies, eminently suited for his next reincarnation. In this manner he travels from life to life, assimilating his diverse experiences. Death is only a change of consciousness. It is neither good nor bad. It is a stage in the process of evolution towards eternity.

This is a perfect world made by a perfect being. God has no imperfection. Whatever He has created has been done

with absolute laws. He is very kind. He created the law of death, which nobody likes, but he created the law of birth too. How happy it makes one to have a child! The entire household rejoices. Everyone congratulates the new parents. Kabir has said:

*What if a son is born, why do you feel such intense pleasure?
This is only the to and fro movement of the shuttle in a loom.*

When someone dies, no one congratulates the kith and kin, as death is considered to be an unfortunate happening. But God says that the law of death is correct. In fact, He made this law out of His love and compassion for the world. What would have happened if He had not made this law? God is all merciful; He is the *Poorna Paramatma*. Whatever He does, He does correctly and to perfection.

Why is death a positive part of life?

Swami Satyananda: If the department of death were to be closed by the Lord, what havoc there would be on this earth! Death is like passing from a lower grade to a higher grade in school. What would happen if a student liked his grade and did not want to be promoted? He would continue to sit in the same classroom until he became old. Similarly, it is wrong not to proceed in the life cycle due to attachment to relatives, friends and possessions. The significance of birth and death must be understood. Birth means being upgraded and entering a new class. Later on, one will enter the next grade, and on and on. Birth and death are the paths of progress.

What is there to be afraid of in death? A school friend is leaving this grade and entering the next as he has made progress in his studies. However, his friends, teachers, parents and relatives cry and grieve for his departure. Imagine a teacher crying because his students are promoted! Similarly, it is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:13 and 2:11):

*Dehino'smin yathaa dehe kaumaaram yauvanam jaraa;
Tathaa dehaantarapraaptirdheerastatra na muhyati.*

*Ashochyaan anvashochastvam prajnaavaadaamshcha bhaashase;
Gataasoon agataasoomshcha naanushochanti panditaah.*

Just as the embodied soul passes into childhood, youth and old age in this body, so also does he pass into another body; the firm do not grieve over that. (13)

You have grieved for those that should not be grieved for, yet you speak words of wisdom. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead. (11)

Hence, one should know the purpose of death, and only then think of living a hundred years. Death is not a calamity, a bad omen, or God's disgrace. It has an existence, a purpose and a motive of its own. Nature has decided upon certain stages for the evolution of the human being to attain his goal and reach the ultimate. As Paramahansa Yogananda said, "Death must be good, otherwise God would not have ordained that it happen to everyone. So why live in fear of it?"

Why shouldn't people wish for a long life? What is the purpose of death?

Swami Satyananda: The human body is like a motor vehicle operated by a driver. But the car cannot be driven unless it has an engine. Both the driver and the engine are necessary in order to drive the car. There is a passenger sitting in the car, who is the owner. Tell me, who should live a hundred years: the car, the driver or the passenger? Should the passenger who owns the car live? Well, he is immortal, he never dies. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:24):

*Achchhedyo'yamadaahyo'yamakledyo'shoshya eva cha;
Nityah sarvagatah sthaanurachalo'yam sanaatanah.*

This Self cannot be cut, burnt, wet or dried up. It is eternal, all-pervading, stable, ancient and immovable.

Weapons do not hurt him, fire cannot burn him, neither does he get wet with water, nor does he dry with the wind. There

is no use in thinking about the death of the passenger. As for the driver, does one expect him to live for a hundred years? Of course, because the driver and the passenger are one and the same person – it is an owner-driven car. In the *Ramayana* it is said, “The individual soul is part of God, the immortal.” Adi Shankaracharya says the same, “The individual soul is like the cosmic soul; it is not a stranger.” If the driver and the passenger are one, and the passenger is immortal, there is no question of the driver’s longevity.

The question of the car, therefore, remains. Will one pray to God to let the same old dilapidated model remain? Does one not want to change the old model for a new one? Will one go on driving the same old Ambassador car forever? There are so many new models available. Some are air-conditioned and have CD players. Why not go in for a newer and better car?

A person wishes to have a long life, as he is afraid of dying. But there is no use in aspiring to live for a century due to fear of death. Everybody wants to live for a century or more, but what matters is how one uses these added years of life. What objective and fulfilment does one aspire to attain in these years? There is no use in living for a long time like an animal, a madman or a fool. Many people live a long life just for the sake of living, but they are only postponing death.

There is a vedic prayer: ‘Let me live a hundred years; Let me hear a hundred years; Let me see a hundred years.’ However, this prayer was not from an ordinary person, but a rishi, who lived with a resolve in his mind and a purpose for his life. The great saints have said that a person who does sadhana regularly can evolve his spiritual status in one birth. That doesn’t mean that he will change his intelligence or convictions, that he will give up a non-vegetarian diet or start telling the truth. The spiritual transformation takes place within one’s consciousness, individuality and ego. If a person changes the way of experiencing this world, his entire personality will be transformed.

Some individuals have absolved themselves of the fruit of their actions of the previous three or four births in just one

lifetime. This is a difficult task and few can accomplish it. This is not possible for all and sundry, and that is why nature brought in death.

Anyone who wishes to live for a hundred years should do so. However, one should first decide how one is going to spend the years of one's life after the age of fifty. One has got to turn to spirituality as age advances. One has to liberate oneself from all attachments, the love for one's son, daughter, daughter-in-law and grandchildren. These are only family bindings, they are not companions for life.

Why should one not grieve when a person dies?

Swami Satyananda: What is so bad about death and so good about birth? Death should not cause grief. Death is the romance of life. One has to take death in one's stride.

When a leper dies, it is reported in the newspapers, but what is so special about such a death? If a great spiritual guru dies, the news deserves to appear in the papers. A cripple dies in a family and all the members wail in grief. I would think, "Good, he died and has become free. In his next birth he will be born whole and in a better family. The house he lived in was infested with rats and insects, it was leaky and crumbling. In his next birth he will find himself a strong house, built of concrete. He has left this place for a better one." Death is but a change of body. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:25–28):

*Avyakto'yamachintyo'yamavikaaryo'yamuchyate;
Tasmaa evam vidaditvainam naanushochitumarhasi.*

*Attha chainam nityajaatam nityam vaa manyase mrita;
Tathaapi tvam mahaabaaho naivam shochitumarhasi.*

*Jaatasya hi dhruvo mrityurdhruvam janma mrityasya cha;
Tasmaadaparihaarye'rthe na tvam shochitumarhasi.*

*Avyaktaadeeni bhootaani vyaktamadhyaani bhaaratata;
Avyaktanidhanaanyeva tatra kaa paridevanaa.*

This Self is said to be unmanifested, unthinkable and unchangeable. Therefore, knowing this to be such, you should not grieve. (25)

But, even if you think of it as being constantly born and dying, even then, O mighty-armed, you should not grieve! (26)

For, certain is death for the born and certain is birth for the dead; therefore, over the inevitable you should not grieve. (27)

Beings are unmanifested in their beginning, manifested in their middle state, O Arjuna, and unmanifested again in their end! What is there to grieve about? (28)

Can yoga help one come to terms with death?

Swami Niranjanananda: This question can be viewed in another way: can yoga help one come to terms with birth? A person holds a stick in his hands. One end of the stick is birth, the other end is death, and in the middle is life. The things one may do, the philosophies or religions one may follow, the techniques one may practise or evolve are somewhere in the middle, in between birth and death. At present, one is standing in the middle of the stick, looking towards death. Why can one not turn around and look towards birth? The unknown is on both sides of birth and death. After death is the experience of the unknown and before birth also is the experience of the unknown.

One fears death as one is unable to stop the walk towards death. Life is walking towards death, and one knows that after twenty, thirty or forty years, one's life will be finished! The philosophy of death is simple. Everything created, known and identifiable is *nashwara*, subject to decay, but there are other dimensions and realms which are uncreated. These are understood through the agency of spirit, and are known as *ishwara*, not subject to decay. The word *ishwara* is translated as God or divinity, but that is not the correct

definition. In the world of matter every being is nashwara and is experienced in this way, but in the world of spirit, the experience is different. Spirit means the inner identity, the inner self, which is indestructible. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:30):

*Dehee nityam avadhyo'yam dehe sarvasya bhaarata;
Tasmaatsarvaani bhootaani na tvam shochitum arhasi.*

This indweller in the body of everyone is always indestructible, O Arjuna! Therefore, you should not grieve for any creature.

There are certain practices of tantra which help one to understand the experiences that the spirit undergoes after death and before birth. However, these are powerful meditations which may totally destroy every conception that one may have, or which may improve the quality of life. The outcome depends on the state of one's inner evolution and on how well one is able to accept and handle this new awareness, this change in perception. In tantra there are many meditation practices that guide the awareness through the various layers of samskara into the dimension of the unknown. Here one experiences the body and personality dissolving into the continuity of consciousness.

Meditations for conscious dying are explained in many books. There are things that one must do in preparation for and at the time of death. There are traditional practices that are taught to people who are fearful of dying and attached to their present state of life, and who fear the loss of material identity and thus hamper the evolution of their consciousness. These practices are beneficial for certain types of personalities, but not for all. They can be used by the emotional or intellectual personality, but definitely not by the dynamic or the psychic, intuitive personality, as the levels of consciousness and of perception and understanding are different. Each personality has its strengths and weaknesses, and deals with death either positively or negatively.

If a person is aware of his personality and is able to develop willpower and creative energy, there is no reason why he cannot come to terms with death or birth. By strengthening the mind, one changes the way of perceiving and realizing death. If one is mentally weak, one will be fearful. But if one is mentally strong, there will be a natural tendency to accept death, as fear is not there. Yoga strengthens the mind, so from this perspective, yoga can help one come to terms with death. For the weak-minded, there are also meditation practices, but they have to be learned under the guidance of a teacher who can monitor and observe the practitioner.

What is the best understanding of death?

Swami Satyananda: In Japan, death is considered an honour, and in India, it is a celebration. When people die they are wrapped in colourful clothes and celebrations take place with music, drums and clarinet. People sing and dance and after that there are feasts. They do this because they know that the person is not finished; he has only left this body for another body. Death is not inauspicious.

What is the best attitude to have towards one's own death?

Swami Satyananda: The normal span of life is one hundred years or more, but one cannot say when one will die. Death is uncertain; a different law of karma controls it. The body is controlled by a separate karma. Sometimes the body could live for twenty years more, but the spirit is not willing to live any longer in that body. Sometimes the body cannot live any longer, but the spirit wants to live on in that body. Therefore, the destiny of the spirit and the law of the body have to interact with each other. When the karma with that body is over, one should not regret it. I am not talking about untimely death or death at a young age. I am talking about death in old age.

Everybody should book their ticket for the new world by the age of sixty-five or seventy. Even if God says, "My boy,

your reservation is not yet made; all the seats are booked,” one should make an advance payment and whenever there is a vacant seat, take it and leave this world. Death should be celebrated as birth is celebrated. It should be a day of feasting because nothing wrong has happened. One is only leaving the old apartment for a new one, only discarding the old cloak for a new one. One is only discarding this incapable old body for a new one in which one will have more enjoyment.

It should also be remembered that the next birth is going to be influenced by one’s philosophy of life and death. Whether one wants it or not, one is going to die, because it is the law of nature. But when one enters the next body, how is one going to behave? In the same way as one behaved in this birth, or will the quality of attitude and behaviour in the next incarnation improve? The carelessness of this life should not be repeated. This is one of the important factors of this philosophy.

The only question that governs life is: what is the purpose of this and every other incarnation? The reply should be simple: to experience the universality and luminosity of the higher self, to be enlightened, to obtain nirvana or samadhi. One has to realize ‘I am all’. This should be the guiding and governing philosophy of a person’s life, and then everything will automatically be set in order.

Do people experience death in different ways?

Swami Satyananda: Yes, it is experienced differently, according to the level of consciousness. For those who are attached to the mundane things, death is painful. They don’t want to die. For those who have realized that death is a point from which they can progress and get better opportunities, it is a matter of happiness. And for those who have been facing a lot of problems and have not been able to cope with them, it is a very good sleep, and they can just forget about everything.

There are two types of beliefs, which are not merely confined to religions, but are more confined to individuals.

One is that after death there is no survival of consciousness – that's the final chapter of man's pilgrimage. Another belief is that after death the consciousness survives and therefore death is not the last chapter of life, it is just one chapter of life. Therefore, for the first category of people, death is painful, but for those who believe they will continue to survive, it is not.

Is it helpful to believe that there is life after death?

Swami Satyananda: So far as life and death are concerned, one has to know about them. Hindus know about the *janma*, life, the inner *janma*, after-life, and the life in between and how the soul moves. It is necessary to know these things, as one comes to realize that the body is not the person. There is something else that migrates from one body to another, from one life to another; one needs to understand the *atman*, the spirit or consciousness and so many other forces.

Many great saints have written books which indicate life after death. In fact, this is a sound philosophy, for if a person really believes in his own continuity, death is not inauspicious. This philosophy is an optimistic approach. If one does not believe in life after death, there is a lot of fear and no hope, as one thinks this is the only chance. This is also an important question, as this philosophy determines many factors in the personality and many psychological problems can be rectified by it.

Certainly, yoga believes that there is evolution in the realm of matter, in the realm of mind, and in every realm. In yoga it is not possible to believe that one is just born with this totality of mass. It is illogical to believe that anything has just come about without following a process of evolution. The present life forms a link in a long chain of evolution. Therefore, in yoga reincarnation is not viewed as a religious belief; it is a logical outcome of reason.

2

Time of Transition

FEAR OF DEATH

Why shouldn't death be feared?

Swami Sivananda: Birth follows death just as waking follows sleep; a person will resume the work that was left off in the previous life. Therefore, no one should not be afraid of death.

What is the biggest wonder of the world?

Swami Satyananda: There is an episode in the *Mahabharata* called *Yaksha Prashna* in which the Yaksha asks a question of each of the five Pandavas who were going through the forest. However, the first four Pandavas were arrogant and did not reply. Hastily, the eldest brother, Yudhishtira, came to the spot and the Yaksha said, "Before you fill up the drum with water for your mother, you must answer my questions. I will allow you to take water only if you can reply." The first question the Yaksha asked was, "What is the most surprising thing in this world?" Yudhishtira replied, "It is seen that people are dying every day, but those who are living still crave for immortality." Birth is indefinite and uncertain, but death is a definite certainty. There can be no two opinions about it, yet everyone is frightened of death. This is the biggest wonder of the world.

Why do people fear death?

Swami Niranjanananda: Every individual is subject to four basic instincts: desire, attachment or *kama*; sleep, disconnection or *nidra*; *bhaya*, fear and insecurity; and *maithuna*, passion, sensuality and sexuality. The third basic instinct is fear, fear of losing something, fear of lacking something in life. Desires and fears are the outcome of a condition of lack and absence within oneself.

As an instinct, fear is something much deeper than that which is expressed in life, and the last vestige of fear is the fear of death and dying. It is the last imprint of fear in one's life, the fear of dying, of losing everything – fear of losing one's association, connection, attachment, comfort, security and safety zone. It is the fear of not existing. The fear of dying and death is deeply rooted in the mind of everyone. It leads to the development of insecurities in life which indicate the absence of strength and clarity.

How is the fear of death overcome?

Swami Satyananda: When death is judged from a limited point of view, it seems to be frightening. But if the darkness and pain of death are judged from a cosmic point of view, they would not exist at all. From the individual point of view, death is pain, but pain is not the destiny of everything that exists. Pain is a condition of the mind. In order to better understand this question, one has to understand the nature of God. When a person realizes that one continues to live in spirit, even after the death of the body, there need be no fear of death. When one sees death as a process of changing into a new role, a new life, a new opportunity, a new karma, a new model of body free from its present afflictions, one becomes free of fear. Death is only a transition, leaving this house to go to a bigger or smaller house. In old age most people try to think of God, but if they were to remember God from their childhood, they would reap a rich spiritual harvest in old age.

What dies and what lives on after death?

Swami Satyananda: Death is not the end of the book; it is the end of one chapter. The soul is immortal, it does not die. Death belongs to the body. If a light bulb is broken, it is the end of the bulb, but the electrical current is still there. There is a universal soul, a universal reality, and everyone is part of it, not different from it. The physical body is born from the mother, but inside the body are both the mind and the spirit. When the body dies, the spirit does not.

I have thought about this for many years because it is one of the greatest philosophical problems of humanity. Many people do not know what happens hereafter. The materialists think that nothing survives the death of the body. For them, the body, mind and emotions are matter. Therefore, when the body dies, they think that nothing survives. However, many cases have been recorded which prove the fact that death is only a temporary cessation of life.

There is something in man and in matter that does not die. There is a mortal flame, a mortal aspect and an immortal aspect. A person is an assembly of two elements. The body is the mortal element; one sees and knows it. However, what happens to the mind, consciousness and ego after death? Much more important, what happens to the infinite desires that are cultivated during a lifetime, which remain unfulfilled at the time of death? Are they all finished? One has been thinking and desiring for the whole life and there are unfulfilled ambitions at the moment of death. Are these mental phenomena mortal or immortal? If they are mortal, the issue is finished. But where do the infinite desires, ambitions, love, attachment and so on go if they are immortal? What happens to them?

Along with the body and mind, there is a third dimension of being: the consciousness, the soul, the spirit. Is this mortal or immortal? If one says it is mortal, I want concrete proof. I know that the body is mortal, I have seen it. But what is the proof that the spirit is mortal and subject to disintegration, decay, death and destruction? This is an important question,

which every open-minded and thinking person must confront. Unless this question about the immortal aspect of man is answered, the first question cannot be answered. Once one is sure about what happens to the immortal in man, whether it stays somewhere eternally static or keeps moving from one body to another, one can answer this question.

The first point to remember is that death is not total. It just relates to the body and nothing else is destroyed. Point two: even the death of the body is not extinction, but a process of disintegration. If an earthenware pot breaks, what is broken? The earth from which the pot was made remains although the form of the pot changes. Earth goes back to earth. Similarly, the body form, which is composed of the five elements: earth, water, fire, air and ether, is destroyed at the time of death, but the elements remain. When the spirit leaves the body, the physical frame remains and undergoes the process of disintegration. At the time of death, when the body is placed on the funeral pyre, the five tattwas go back to their original source: space to space, air to air, fire to fire, water to water and earth to earth.

The whole cosmos is composed of these five elements, so the individual elements become universal when they return to their source after death. This always happens, for an individual is a part of the totality. After the physical body dies, the five tattwas go back to their original source and the soul or *jivatma* moves out in the form of vibration. The soul survives death and is reborn again and again. After the soul moves out of the body, it does not incarnate for some time. During the period in-between incarnations, the disembodied soul is called a spirit. It is made up of fine elements, fine and powerful vibrations. After some time, according to the law of karma, the soul is born again in a body, and then it is called an embodied spirit.

What is the cause of fear of death?

Swami Niranjanananda: People are not afraid of death, but of losing their associations with the senses, the environment,

the people who surround them, with those things they have created and are attached to. The fear of losing them is mistaken as fear of death. The fear of disconnecting oneself from these ideas and objects of identification is somehow confused with the fear of death. Nobody is afraid of death. It is just as enjoyable as sleep. It is only due to confusion and lack of clarity that one fears a survival without any association in life.

People are too insecure in life and develop associations in order to please the mind. Everything that one does in life is to please oneself. People believe that by pleasing themselves they will be happy. This has become an intricate process of pleasing and trying to find fulfilment and satisfaction in that pleasure, and has led to the development of associations with different objects, people, the environment, society, family and home. The mind becomes conditioned to associate and identify with these associations.

When one believes that the associations will not be there anymore, one develops fear. It is known as *abhinivesha* in yogic terminology – the fear of losing everything, the fear of dying and not being able to connect with life anymore. Life represents a sequence of associations, and death represents absolutely no association but being self-contained, withdrawing everything.

The body is an intricate system. It is composed of matter yet what makes the matter tick is the energy within the matter. *Padartha* and *shakti*, matter and energy, both make up this human body. Once the energy is withdrawn from the matter, there is nothing to hold the matter together anymore. Once the prana is withdrawn from the body, there is nothing to hold the body together anymore, and the body decays. There is no other form of death, death is only physical. The mind remains alive and contains the karmas and samskaras.

The mind is a part of the soul. It is an integral part of the spirit. They are not two different things. The hand is part of the body. If it is not the body, it is part of the body. It has a

function and a role to perform. Similarly, the mind is part of the spirit; it has a role and a function to perform. Spirit and mind travel together. It is possible that through awareness, understanding and experience, one can overcome such fears and insecurities in life and find peace and happiness.

PROCESS OF DYING

What is the process of death?

Swami Niranjanananda: Death has captured the imagination of humanity and everybody is trying to think and speculate as to what happens when one dies. However, another question is, “What happens before one is born?” Once one figures out what happens before one is born, it becomes easier to understand what happens when one dies. There is the union of the male and female principles, the putting in of the seed, and it taking the form of the body. Once the body is made, the senses have come in and the organs have formed, the injection of spirit into the body takes place. In a morgue the bodies are rolled up in plastic and lying on the table as if they are sleeping. The body is complete; there is nothing missing, but life is missing. That missing life in a dead body is the spirit.

The association of the spirit with the body creates different forms of spirit. In relation to the physical body, the spirit becomes breath. In relation to the subtle body, spirit is the warmth and heat, and once the heat leaves the body, it becomes cold and dead. Heat is the nature of spirit in relation to the subtle body, *teja*. In relation to the causal body, the spirit is awareness: I know that ‘I exist. This is my identity, this is my life. I am an individual being. I have a distinct personality’. Awareness is the manifestation of spirit in the causal body. Realization of the spirit as *atma*, the soul, is the realization of spirit in the spiritual dimension.

These different associations of spirit with the body together make life. If one stops breathing, the body will die. If the heat, the *teja* leaves, the body will die. With absence of

awareness, the body will die. With the departure of the spirit, the body will die.

Where did the spirit that came from some place into the body come from? There is no storehouse where all the spirits are packed together and one is let out at a time, when a body is available. Rather it is a miracle that happens.

When the combination of the elements, the *tattwas*, happens in the right manner, the manifestation of spirit is the result or the effect of the combination and permutation of these *tattwas*. A spirit is the result of the right combination of the *tattwas*. This is the essence inherent in every element. If life is the inherent essence in every element, then spirit is also the inherent essence in every element.

When one dies, first the breath stops. The first disconnection is the breath. Second, the *prana shaktis* are withdrawn, the heat is lost and the body becomes inert and cold. Third, the consciousness leaves the body; one does not identify with time and space and object. Fourth, the spirit which was contained in this body again merges with the cosmic *tattwas*. This is the theory according to yoga.

Why is it important to have a good philosophy when dying?

Swami Satyananda: After death, the soul leaves the body and the total karma of the person guides the future movement. At the time of death, the *karmas* condense into a seed-like form and the soul is guided by the property or quality of those *karmas*. If one has lived a full life, the forward movement is smooth. But if one has not completed the full cycle of life, maybe one has died suddenly in an accident, the forward movement is delayed for some time. Death occurring at an early age definitely delays the forward movement of the soul towards the next incarnation.

Whether the death was expected or unexpected determines the forward movement of the soul. The person who dies unexpectedly and does not complete the cycle of experience in this life has a tendency to look back after death. Here is a simple analogy to clarify this point. A

person who is living in an apartment decides that he must leave, for it is no longer suitable. He packs up everything and moves out. Within a few hours or days, he is happily settled in a new apartment. However, suppose the person does not want to leave the apartment, but he is compelled to by circumstances. Naturally, there will be hesitation, a process of looking back. Maybe he will even see whether he can reoccupy that flat, and will try to stay there in one way or another. This is what happens with the souls who depart from the body unprepared. Therefore, the right philosophy and understanding about death has to be ingrained in the mind while living.

Sometimes it is said that death is painful. Is this true?

Swami Sivananda: Birth and death are two false scenes in the unreal drama of maya. That is her nature and habit. The *Garuda Purana* and *Atma Purana* describe the pangs of death as tantamount to the pain caused by the stings of 72,000 scorpions. However, according to the unanimous reports of enlightened spirits who have clearly described their experiences, there is not even a bit of pain during death. They have stated that they were relieved of the great burden of this physical body and enjoyed perfect composure at the time of separation from the physical body. At the time of death, the little distortion and contraction that one feels is just the effort of the pranic double to extricate itself from the physical body. The experience is said to be painless, but why does it matter even if it is painful when death promises light behind the curtain!

What dies and what lives on in terms of the gross, subtle and causal bodies?

Swami Satyananda: There are three bodies which make up one's existence and they constantly interact with each other. In philosophy these three are: (i) the gross body or *sthoola sharira*, (ii) the astral or subtle body, *sukshma sharira*, and (iii) the causal body or *karana sharira*. The physical body is

the gross body, the mind is the subtle body, and the totality of a person's karma is the causal body. These are the three bodies which one inherits: one has a body, a mind and karma. The indweller of these three bodies is the self, or atman. When the atman is living in the body, it is called the *jivatman*, living soul.

When a person dies, the *jivatman* leaves the physical body along with the astral and causal bodies; the physical body doesn't migrate. Death is not associated with the astral or causal bodies or with the atman. Death belongs only to the physical body. The *sthoola sharira*, or gross body, is buried, burnt or disposed of, but the *sukshma sharira* or subtle body, composed of the five *karmendriyas*, five *jnanendriyas*, five *pranas*, four faculties of *antahkarana* and one *atma*, leaves the body.

After one leaves this body, the *karmas* are stored in the causal body in seed form. The subtle body is necessary, if the departed soul has desires. The passions and emotions inhabit the subtle astral body. Desire, anger, passion and fear live in the astral body. The subtle mind, comprised of *buddhi*, intellect, *chitta*, the storehouse of memory, and *ahamkara*, I-ness, is the main component of the subtle astral body, whereas *manas*, the thought process, and the senses are part of the gross body.

Death is the destruction of the elements, which comprise the gross body. Permutation and combination of the five elements create the gross body, which is comprised of the brain, heart, lungs, digestive system, muscles, nerves, bones, marrow and blood. The gross body is enlivened by *prana*, the energy which permeates the physical body. Just as a motor pump is operated by electrical energy, in the same way, the gross body lives and functions as long as *prana* flows through it. The *pranas* are fivefold as they are concerned with the different functions in the gross body. As long as the *pranas* are functioning smoothly, the gross body lives and acts. But when the *pranas* are dissociated from the body, the body is unable to move.

After death, when the jivatman departs in combination with the astral and causal bodies, it is known as a spirit. Most spirits are ordinary, but there are some great ones. When a person dies due to an accident, the spirit remains in the disembodied state for a longer time. Most spirits have attachment to their previous existence and they haunt it for some time. This attachment fades by a natural process and the spirit moves on for reincarnation.

After the death of the physical body the karmas remain in the causal body and are then transferred to another body. In this body one is obliged to undergo all the necessary experiences carried over from the effects of the previous life. This is the philosophy of transmigration.

In terms of the koshas, what dies and what lives on?

Swami Satyananda: Three koshas are left behind on the earth: *annamaya kosha*, the food body, *pranamaya kosha*, the etheric body, and *manomaya kosha*, the mental body. Only two koshas are carried further, *vijnanamaya kosha*, the psychic body, and *anandamaya kosha*, the bliss body, reduced to the finest form. When all the *koshas* or bodies are reduced to the finest form, the awareness of the individual soul, or jivatma, places karma on the anandamaya kosha.

These two bodies, the *vijnanamaya* and *anandamaya* koshas, guided by their karmas or desires, leave this physical body and go to another body. Without the physical body, the soul cannot understand anything. Its movements are unconscious and they are guided by the karma. The innocent and ignorant soul is carried by the karmas, like a baby is carried by the mother. The soul is like a baby and the karmas are like the mother.

The role of the *gunas* at the time of death is described by Sri Krishna in the following verses of the *Bhagavad Gita* (14:14–15):

*Yadaa sattve pravriddhe tu pralayam yaati dehabhrit;
Tadottamavidaam lokaanamalaanpratipadhyate.*

*Rajasi pralayam gatvaa karmasangishu jaayate;
Tathaa praleenastamasi moodhayonishu jaayate.*

When a man dies during the preponderance of sattwa, he obtains the spotless worlds attained by knowers of the Highest. (14)

Dying when rajas predominates, he is born among those attached to action, and dying in tamas he is reborn in the womb of the senseless. (15)

What aspect of individuality is destroyed in death and what survives death?

Swami Sivananda: There is a distinction between personality and individuality. That which distinguishes one person from another is personality. In common parlance the personality is associated with the body. The term personality comes from the Latin persona, the mask, or what appears on the surface. Personality is that particular aspect of the mind which concerns the physical body. Death destroys the personality, but it cannot annihilate the individuality.

The individuality is one's separate and distinct existence beyond the body. It has no relation to the personality. It is the sense of 'I', which is like a continuous current. The personality changes, but the individuality, the sense of 'I', never changes. After leaving this physical body, the sense of 'I' continues to exist and accompanies one after death. Even in a dream and in deep sleep one has the sense of 'I' within. If one did not have the sense of 'I' in deep sleep, one would not remember that one slept happily.

What happens to the spirit in a body which is in suspended animation?

Swami Niranjanananda: The spirit entering the body after the body has been kept in a deep freezer for years is the same soul, the same spirit. The body is kept in a deep freezer and revived, like in science fiction movies, where people are put into suspended animation or 'deep sleep' and woken up

after one year or ten years or fifteen years. In this state the breath becomes shallow; there is no disconnection of spirit. Instead of breathing maybe eleven times per minute, one breathes three, four or five times. There is no disconnection with the body.

The metabolic, catabolic and anabolic activities of the body become slow and heat is preserved in the body through a mechanical process. Even though externally one may be frozen, the instruments which maintain and monitor different parts of the body, that of suspended animation or deep sleep, ensure that teja or warmth continues to exist in the critical organs, like the heart and lungs. There is no disconnection, as there was never any break in the strand of life. When these people are revived, they come back with the same nature, the same mind, the same mentality, the same personality and the same soul.

What is the best way to die?

Swami Satyananda: There are two ways to die: consciously and unconsciously. Awareness plays an important part in dying consciously. Awareness is the knowledge of what is happening. At the time of death this faculty is not present in most people – it becomes withdrawn and dormant. However, a person who practises yoga remains aware, even while the soul is leaving the body. There are some evolved souls who remain fully aware at the time of death, so their departure is a conscious death. They know when they are leaving the body and may even know beforehand.

In India, many householders, especially those who have been doing sadhana and leading a higher life, inform all their kith and kin months before they are to die. They declare the date and time of their death, so that all their sons, daughters, in-laws, grandchildren and so on can congregate and there are great celebrations and festivities in the family. On the appointed day the person sits in the lotus posture, withdraws his prana and dies. After that, his clothes are removed and he is given a bath with sandalwood paste,

cow's milk and saffron water. Bhajans and kirtans are sung throughout the day.

This kind of event is common in India, so people here expect to die sitting upright in padmasana and in meditation. When someone is dying, the loved ones say to the person, "Hey, repeat the name of God; say, Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram." In that way they know whether the dying person is conscious or unconscious. One of the greatest wishes of old people is to leave the body while chanting God's name. The dying person's thought at the time of the last breath is most important. Everybody has a last thought and a last action, such as drinking water, doing japa, going to the toilet, talking to somebody. One's last act, last thought and last breath should be God's name, as the last thought determines the onward journey.

How should one prepare for death?

Swami Niranjanananda: How does one prepare for a journey? One packs one's bags, cleans one's room, takes all the necessary items for the journey and checks the bags three times to see whether everything is really necessary or not: "Shall I take this or that, or shall I leave this behind?" One has to prepare for death in the same manner. Death is travelling, and it is necessary to see which commitments, obligations and duties have been fulfilled. It is clearing one's slate.

In 2009, while talking to a group of people, Swami Satyananda said one sentence that stayed in my mind: "Remember everything that I am saying because I am wiping everything from my hard disk. After telling you I won't remember what I have said because I am cleaning my hard disk."

It was only one sentence. He was not keeping anything in mind, good or bad, neutral, positive or negative, optimistic or pessimistic, happy or sad. Nothing. He just cleared his mind of everything, of all associations, attachments, duties, obligations and promises. That is preparation. The most

important preparation is clearing out. This happens when the mind is relatively free of its own desires and expectations; then one can say, "All right, the slate is clear." But as long as the mind is subject to the influences of desires, thoughts, feelings and emotions, the appropriate action may not be possible at the time of death.

The last impression in the mind becomes active at the time of death. The last connection of the mind with the world is most important and, therefore, in India it is said that at the time of death the thought has to be positive. The thought has to be spiritual, either of God or something transcendental, not of gross or material things. Therefore, there is an elaborate system of rituals in India at the time of death. When the dying person is lying on his deathbed, people start chanting the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana* and other chants. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the sound goes in and affects the psyche. It diverts the mind from the outer world to something more spiritual.

The ritual of chanting mantras at the time of death has been so ingrained in the Indian culture that every family does it. This also brings a lot of peace to the people who are leaving, because at the time of death, the life which one has led opens up in front of one's eyes like an open book. If one becomes involved in analyzing one's life situations, circumstances and activities, precious time is lost. Therefore, the mind is geared towards meditation, prayer, mantra and God. If, in the life of the sadhaka, there is a close relationship with the guru, the guru appears to guide the dying person to reach the next stage.

How does the last thought before death determine the next birth?

Swami Sivananda: The last thought of a person governs his future destiny; it determines his future birth. Desires are endless, so a person cannot gratify all his desires in just one birth. At the time of death, the whole storehouse of impressions and desires is churned. The strongest and most

cherished desire comes to the surface of the mind, the field of mental consciousness. Thus, the churned-up cream of cherished desires arrests the attention of the dying person, and at the time of death he thinks only of that immediate gratification. Just as the most vital mango plant shoots up prominently in the nursery, so also the strongest desire shoots up to the surface of the mind at the time of death. If the desire is not gratified, the mind gets saturated with it, and in the next birth that desire will become prominent.

The predominant thought at the time of death is what has occupied the person's attention most in his life. The last thought determines the next birth and the nature or character of the body to be attained. Thus it is said, "As a man thinks, so shall he become." In the *Bhagavad Gita* (8:14–15), Sri Krishna said:

*Ananyachetaah satatam yo maam smarati nityashah;
Tasyaaham sulabhah paartha nityayuktasya yoginah.*

*Maamupetya punarjanma duhkhaalayamashaashvatam;
Naapnuvanti mahaatmaanah samsiddhim paramaam gataah.*

Whoever thinks of Me constantly and intensely with a one-pointed mind, to such steadfast yogis, I am easily attainable. (14)

Having thus reached Me and merged in Me, they are not born again in the fleeting world of woe and misery. O Arjuna! (15)

Is it possible to direct the thought towards God during the last breath?

Swami Satyananda: It is difficult to remember God at the last breath, even if one has led a spiritual life. Tulsidas has written:

*Birth after birth the munis keep trying.
Still the name of Rama does not come
From their mouths at the time of death.*

A person's main desire during his lifetime becomes his last thought. In this life a person may be wretched in every sense, but during the last moments before his departure, he may think of high spiritual ideas. This is nearly impossible, but if it happens, the next birth will be directed by that last thought. The person will incarnate, according to that last thought in his previous life. However, the other karmas of previous lives will also follow him into the next incarnation, even with that great sankalpa. He may be born in good circumstances, but there will also be suffering. One has to face and confront one's karma, so one has to suffer and one has to enjoy. One can escape anything in life; one can even cheat God, but one cannot cheat one's karma.

Karma is the witness, the watchdog within, who is there all the time, making notes in his computer; everything is being computerized. Karma is what determines the last desire, ambition or aspiration that carries one on after death and places one in a family at the time of rebirth. If one has spiritual aspirations, but also many other ambitions side by side, only the most prominent idea in life will come to mind at the time of death. If one's last thought is, "I must realize," one will be realized. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (8:6):

*Yam yam vaapi smaranbhaavam tyajatyante kalevaram;
Tam tamevaiti kaunteya sadaa tadbhaavabhaavitah.*

At the end whosoever leaves the body, thinking of any being, to that being only does he go, O son of Kunti, because of his constant thought of that being!

The deciding factor is the person's desire at the time of death. The last desire, ambition or aspiration carries one on after death and places one in a family at the time of rebirth. The last desire is the sum total of one's life.

How can one direct one's last thought?

Swami Niranjanananda: It is believed that the soul is guided by the last thought or impression a human being can have.

Therefore, it is always said that when one is breathing the last breaths, one should not think of family, attachments and insecurities, but rather of God. There are stories which tell of people who were absolute non-believers and crooked in life, but in the last stage of their life they thought of God and were liberated. This does happen; it is not a fantasy of the human mind. The last thought or the last impression is supposed to be the most vital one for the continuation of the spirit's journey.

How can one ensure one's last thought will be of God?

Swami Sivananda: In the *Bhagavad Gita* (8:2), Arjuna asked Sri Krishna this question:

Prayaanakaale cha katham jneyo'si niyataatmabhih.

And how, at the time of death, are You to be known by the self-controlled one?

The constant practice of fixing the mind on the Lord, even though the person is engaged in worldly pursuits, will enable him to intuitively and automatically think of the Lord, even at the time of death. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (8:8):

*Abhyaasayogayuktena chetasaa naanyagaaminaa;
Paramam purusham divyam yaati paarthaanuchintayan.*

With the mind made steadfast by the yoga of constant practice, not moving towards any other thing and constantly meditating, one goes to the supreme person, the resplendent, O Arjuna!

The last thought will be only of God in that person who has disciplined the mind throughout life and has tried to fix it on the Lord by constant practice. This cannot come by practice in a day or two, a week or a month. It is a life-long endeavour and struggle. God-consciousness is difficult to hold at the time of death when disease torments the body and the consciousness begins to fade. The thought of God

comes to a person at the time of death only through the grace of the Lord. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (8:5), one will find:

*Antakaale cha maameva smaranmuktvaa kalevaram;
Yah prayaati sa madbhaavam yaati naastyatra samshayah.*

And whosoever, leaving the body, goes forth remembering Me alone at the time of death, he attains My Being; there is no doubt about this.

Sri Krishna continues and describes the process of dying the perfect death (8:9–13):

*Kavim puraananamanushaasitaaram anoraneeyaamsam-
anusmaredyah;
Sarvasya dhaataaramachintyaroopam aadityavarnam
tamasah parastaat.*

*Prayaanakaale manasaachalena bhaktyaa yukto yogabalena chaiva;
Bhruvormadhye praanamaaveshya samyak sa tam param
purusham upaiti divyam.*

*Yadaksharam vedavido vadanti vishanti yadyatayo veetaraagaah;
Yadichchhanto brahmacharyam charanti tatte padam sangrahena
pravakshye.*

*Sarvadvaaraani samyamya mano hridi nirudhya cha;
Moordhnyaadhaayaatmanah praanamaasthito yogadhaaranaam.*

*Omityekaaksharam brahma vyaaharanmaamanusmaran;
Yah prayaati tyajandeham sa yaati paramaam gatim.*

Whosoever meditates on the Omniscient, the Ancient, the Ruler of the whole world, minuter than an atom, the Supporter of all, of inconceivable form, effulgent like the sun and beyond the darkness of ignorance, (9)

At the time of death, with unshaken mind, endowed with devotion and by the power of yoga, fixing the whole life-breath in the middle of the two eyebrows, he reaches that resplendent Supreme Person. (10)

That which is declared imperishable by those who know the Vedas, that which the self-controlled ascetics and passion-free enter, that desiring which celibacy is practised – that goal I will declare to you in brief. (11)

Having closed all the gates, confined the mind in the heart and fixed the life-breath in the head, engaged in the practice of concentration, (12)

Uttering the monosyllable Om – the Brahman – remembering Me always, he who departs thus, leaving the body, attains to the supreme goal. (13)

What is the best way to prepare for death?

Swami Satyananda: Everyone should plan for death. If a person wants to plan for death, my only suggestion would be: prepare for sannyasa. One should approach one's guru on the day of Sivaratri or Guru Poornima, or if one doesn't have a guru, ask any sadhu or swami for sannyasa; then follow all the rules laid down for a sannyasin. Call a barber and shave the head and tuft; that way any identification with Hinduism will be removed. The guru will remove the sacred thread and one's former name. He will chant the *shraaddha* mantra which is chanted at the burial ground, and give a new name and a new structure of life. In the same body a new atman will be transplanted, so death and birth will take place together.

When Adi Shankara was in the jaws of a crocodile in the river, he cried out to his mother on the shore, "Permit me to take sannyasa and I will have a new lease on life." His mother, of course, would not have permitted him to take sannyasa in any other circumstance. But at this point she wanted to keep him alive, even as a sannyasin. She said, "All right, you can take sannyasa. I give you permission." The moment she said this, the crocodile released its grip and Shankara swam back to the shore.

Why are scriptures read to the dying person?

Swami Sivananda: Everyone desires to die a peaceful death with the mind fixed on God. When the memory fails, the sacred sentences of the scriptures will remind one of the real nature. When the mind of the dying person is gradually turned away from the network of worldly matters and centred on the image of the Lord, his glories, lilas and teachings, favourable conditions are created for the passing of his life-breath. The mind peacefully alights on the thought of God, and when real discrimination and dispassion dawn in him at the time of death, it will provide him the solace which the soul strives for.

TO HELP THE DYING

What should the approach be towards someone who is dying?

Swami Satyananda: One must have a realistic philosophy regarding sickness and death. The person who is to die will die. Is it necessary to be sorry when a person is dying? Think about it. The dying person is suffering and unhappy, but if others around him also become unhappy, who is going to create happiness? If someone is dying, others should not become unhappy. They should be happy and come to tell the dying person jokes and stories and make him smile.

Separation is the law of life. Whenever one has a friend, lover or enemy, one is going to be separated from them. Nature has created a process of balance in creation. This law of separation is simple to understand, particularly in the case of a terminally ill or old person. If one doesn't want the dying person to go, even though he has to, it creates a problem for him. He knows his dear one does not want to be separated from him, but he does not know how to avoid it. Even after death he cannot be in peace, as there is a feeling in the depths of his mind that the near one is suffering on account of him. However, the departing person goes with peace when he knows that his loved one bids him farewell with all happiness.

One must have the correct philosophy, therefore, in regard to the dying person for his further evolution. Separation has caused many problems and humanity has not yet discovered the philosophy to deal with this natural phenomena. One must discover a philosophy for oneself with which to face separation. This will be better for the near ones who live on, and better for the person who is dying. In this way the near ones will be happy and the departing person will be happy, but as it is now, neither can be happy.

How can someone suffering from an incurable disease be helped?

Swami Satyananda: First of all, the person who is suffering from an incurable disease should be taught the way to experience peace of mind. The thoughts in the last stage of life are the deciding factor for one's future destiny. When one is involved sensually with the affairs of life, the mind is dissipated, but when one suffers mentally or physically, the mind becomes one-pointed. This is the law of nature. When a person lives in comfort and luxury, the mind becomes tamasic, but when one suffers from any sickness, the mind becomes dynamic. With this dynamic mind the person creates a lot of images which are responsible for his future destiny. The terminally ill person should be exposed to spiritual ideals more and more, so that he will live his last days in peace and will also die in peace.

Disease is painful, but the pain and suffering of disease can be minimized by improving the quality of consciousness. If one can increase the peace of mind, the pain will be reduced, for pain is an experience of the mind, not of the body. If a person knows the way to separate the body from the mind and the mind from the body, he will not experience pain. This is a simple thing to understand. For instance, when one sleeps at night one does not remember pain, as the mind is withdrawn. But when the mind becomes conscious in the morning, the pain begins again. Therefore, pain is a

product of the relationship between the body and the mind, and the same applies to pleasure.

Many people say that death is painful, but it is only the idea that is painful. At the time of death the person has to leave all those things to which he is attached, such as kith and kin and the toys of life; that is painful. One has to leave the bank account, house, wife or husband and children. One has to leave name and body. Therefore, the element of *vairagya*, non-attachment, must be induced after one has crossed the barrier of sixty. In fact, the ancient rule was that from the age of fifty one should gradually look forward, not backward. Death is not a painful process. It is the experience of the mind which causes the pain. The experience of pain is caused by attachments, which are derived from being concerned with this life only.

Most people do not know that they have had lives before this life and will have further lives after it. This life is a link in a long, long chain. It is the effect of a cause and again the cause of an effect. Life is a continuity. The law of causation is true, so a person who is suffering from an incurable sickness should be given this kind of wisdom. There is no sense in fearing death, which is inevitable. I have not seen anyone who is immortal. No man or animal has ever been immortal. That is the law of nature and one has to accept it. There is a universal law which controls each and every sphere of animal, vegetable, mineral and invisible life. These laws of nature are inherent in every being or object. There is no outside controller; the process of control is inherent within matter.

That is the knowledge which should be given to a person who is suffering from an incurable illness. He should not be taught the passion for life. The passions of life are necessary and good for young people, but people who have already crossed their sixties should learn something beyond passion. One has to prepare for the next part of the journey. One has to prepare the suitcase, bank account, and take stock of the karma. Disease cannot cause suffering and death cannot cause pain for a person who has done that.

In India, people suffering from incurable diseases are asked to chant the *Mahamrityunjaya* mantra, which is the mantra for the 'conquest of death', i.e. overcoming the fear of death. Thereby they experience peace of mind and do not disturb the family atmosphere by generating gloom and sorrow.

How can those who are very ill or dying be helped?

Swami Niranjanananda: One should send them good vibrations all the way through. In order to transmit one's energy to the person who is suffering or dying, the first requirement is a tranquil and well-balanced mind. If someone is worried about a dying person, they may be suffering psychically more than the dying person, and so be unable to transmit positive energy. In this case, one may perform any type of meditation or healing for the dying person but it will be to no avail. In order to help a person who is very sick or dying, the first requirement is to keep oneself peaceful and clear-minded, build up one's own energy and learn to transmit that energy for the wellbeing of the dying person, either in this life or in the next.

In the tantra shastras there are many forms of meditation for death and dying. Some of these techniques have been brought to light by different scholars and teachers and are becoming popular in western countries. However, they are understood and practised at a superficial level. The practices of meditation which help the sick to get well or to depart peacefully are powerful. They build up a lot of energy within the body, mind, personality, thoughts, feelings, projection and expression.

One must be able to handle the prana which is awakened by such meditations and develop the ability to transmit it to the ill or dying person. One must first have the ability to direct this force of energy within oneself. Preparation for this type of meditation is important. For this purpose the processes of *pratyahara*, introversion of the senses, and *dharana*, concentration of the mind, must be mastered. Then

a simple technique of thought transmission for the health and wellbeing of another person should be learned. Once the ability to transmit thought and energy has developed, the meditation for death and dying can be practised. In many cases this meditation will cure the sick person. Healing occurs through psychic willpower, there is no doubt about it.

One practice of psychic healing is prana vidya. The awakening of prana within the body and the transmission of prana for the health of another can occur through this practice. If there is no chance for the other person's improvement, one can still ensure that the evolution of his consciousness will continue after death, and there will be no regression. One can definitely ensure that much and be confident that the person will have a better life next time. Of course, this requires a lot of practice and not everybody is qualified. One may sit down, try it out and feel good. But not everyone has the natural ability. In order to help another it is necessary to have that ability.

What is the effect on one's karma if one helps a person in great suffering to die?

Swami Niranjanananda: I remember the case of a person who had been living in a state of coma for many years. There was a big outcry about the removal of the life-support system and allowing that person to die. It even became a legal case. Everybody felt for the person who had been released from his suffering, because what kind of life is that, being attached to a life-support machine for twenty years? The body and the spirit suffer and are unable to leave that suffering. It is better to remove the suffering. If a person's thoughts and intentions are pure, this release will not have a negative effect on his karma; rather he will be assisting the freedom of that spirit.

3

After Death

SHRAADDHA

What should be done when someone dies?

Swami Satyananda: When somebody dies people must sing and dance, for they are responsible for the atmosphere all around. The time will come when people will dance for joy when death occurs, but it does not happen now. Death depresses people. When death occurs, they can't dance for joy, they can't even smile. They go about with a castor-oil face or a Sunday face. If somebody in the family dies, the first thing I always tell the family members is to call half a dozen people with a harmonium, drums and brass bells. Everybody who comes should start singing.

How can help be given to the souls of the departed?

Swami Sivananda: The disembodied spirits remain earth-bound for some time after death and expect help from their relatives and friends. Prayers, kirtan, *shraaddhas*, or rites for the departed soul, charitable acts and good thoughts help to release the departed souls from their earthbound condition, so that they can rise higher and enter the world of the *pitris*, departed ancestors, in order to enjoy the fruits of their good deeds. Prayers for the dead have formed an integral part of all religious rites. Prayer acts on the principle of a radio broadcast and transmits positive thought waves.

Prayer and kirtan transmit a mighty force, which helps the departed souls on their passage through the intermediate state towards heaven.

What happens to the soul after death?

Swami Sivananda: Immediately after death the departed souls remain in a state of swoon or unconsciousness. They cannot feel that they are detached from their previous, gross, material bodies. Prayers, kirtan and good thoughts from relatives and friends give real solace to them. They create a potent vibration which helps to awaken them from their stupefied condition of mind, and brings them back from the veiled state of consciousness. The departed souls then begin to realize that they are no longer in their gross, material bodies, and they endeavour to cross the borderland, a narrow river of ether, which is known as Vaitrani by the Hindus, Chinavat bridge by the Parsis, and Sirat by the Muslims.

The weeping, loud mourning and uncontrolled grief of their relatives gives them pain and drags them down from the astral planes. This may seriously retard their progress to the heaven-world and cause serious injury to them. When they are sinking peacefully and are ready to have a glorious awakening in heaven, they are aroused into vivid remembrance of the mundane life by the weeping and wailing of their friends and relatives, whose thoughts also produce similar vibrations in their minds and cause acute pain and discomfort.

Relatives and friends, therefore, should do kirtan and prayers for the peace of the departed souls; only then can they really help and comfort them. If ten or twelve persons sit together and do kirtan and prayer, it will definitely be more powerful and effective. Collective prayer and kirtan exercise a tremendous influence on the journey of the departed souls.

In Hinduism, what is done after a person dies?

Swami Satyananda: There are ten openings or doors in this body of which nine are open and one is closed. The nine doors are: two eyes, two nostrils, two ears, mouth, urinary

and excretory organs. The tenth gate is *brahmarandhra*, which is located in the crown lotus. The word *brahma* means 'supreme consciousness' and *randhra* means 'hole'. This hole remains closed in most people and does not open until death. Great yogis, however, are able to open it at will, and their soul leaves the body through that gate.

Hindus believe that the physical body should not remain after death, as the soul will return to it, even in the grave. The etheric or pranic body is connected to the physical body by a silver cord. The soul, along with the etheric body, leaves the physical body at the time of death but the connection between the etheric and physical bodies remains as long as the dead body remains. The dead body must be burned in order to sever this connection. At the time of cremation, when the funeral pyre is lit and the body has begun to burn, the son goes up to it with a piece of wood and breaks the top of the skull. This is done so that any part of the etheric body which may still remain in the physical body will leave.

This important ritual is carried out by Hindus to ensure that the etheric body exits the physical body, because if it does not, it will undergo great pain. As long as the connection to the physical body remains, the soul hovers around it restlessly and is unable to go to another plane. In this state the soul tries to communicate with people in dreams or in other ways, if it can. The soul cannot exhaust its karma unless it is reborn, as karma cannot be exhausted without the help of a living body. At the time of the cosmic deluge, there is a particular day when the karmas of all the unborn souls are finally dispensed. At that time they are released from the bondage of the etheric body, but they will still have to take birth again. Cremation is the general rule in Hinduism, but little babies and sannyasins are an exception because they are considered to be pure. They are buried in order to hold their souls here for some time.

In India, the time of death is usually known beforehand through predictions. Those who die in old age are generally able to predict their death a week or so in advance, so that

they can tell their family members to call all the relatives. From that time they stop all worldly activities and start reading the *Bhagavad Gita* and other scriptures. When the exact moment comes, they close their eyes and die. This kind of death is very common in India. Even without foreknowledge, death is ascertained before cremation by many means which are available in India, apart from a medical certificate.

Hindus believe that the soul still remains in the body after some types of deaths, although the prana departs due to cessation of the heartbeat. The decision to cremate is very difficult to make in the case of death by snake bite, and the body is not burned immediately. They wait and ascertain that the soul has departed from the body. Sometimes it takes up to twenty-four hours after the death to decide. In the case of death by snake bite, people often call experts on mantra shastra and many people are brought back to life. When Swami Vivekananda was in America he said, "It is not a very great thing to bring back a dead man; even ordinary people do it in our country."

When a Hindu dies, relatives first lay the body on the ground, remove all the clothes and place a cloth over it. Then they inform the relatives, priest and astrologer. All the relatives must be called and the dead body cannot be taken out until the eldest son comes. If he is not there or cannot come, the brother's son must be there. In India it is a religious duty to attend the funeral ceremony, even if one has some misunderstanding with that family.

This tradition keeps the society in order and, at the same time, the dead body is kept intact for a long period so that death is ascertained. Meanwhile, many religious ceremonies are performed, like the chanting of mantras and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Ganga water and sandal wood are also brought. These ceremonies are a kind of psychological diversion for people, who are all feeling sad. At the same time, they also have subtle effects on the spirit. They are performed for psychological reasons, but even more for

eschatological reasons. Eschatology is the science pertaining to the other world of the soul.

What is done after a sannyasin dies?

Swami Satyananda: All the funeral ceremonies are done for a sannyasin at the time of initiation. When a person takes sannyasa, he dies and is reborn immediately in the same body. In the case of a sannyasin, if the dead body is burned, the soul will be reborn immediately. Therefore, people do not burn his body because they want his soul to remain after death and not be reborn immediately. The souls of ordinary people create a lot of trouble if they are withheld, while the soul of a sannyasin will always be a guiding influence.

What rituals or practices can be done after death to help the departing spirit?

Swami Niranjanananda: For twelve days after death a very strict discipline is followed in the home. First, on the same day as the death occurs there is shaving of the head, so that the spirit does not recognize the people with whom it had been associated on the physical plane. Second, there are certain times for meals and sleeping, and no one enters the room where the person died. There is not a loud, outward expression of grief. One can be sad, cry and go through all the emotions of mourning, but not in the same room where the death took place, as at that time, the body attachment is very strong.

Thirteen days after the death, the ritual of shraaddha is performed. Shraaddha means the showing of gratitude to the departed person in order to help his spirit overcome the attachments of family and desire. *Tarpan* is the offering of honey, rice and sesame seeds. These three things are offered to the departed soul and thrown into the water of a flowing river. Honey represents the love and affection offered to support the soul on its onward journey. Rice signifies the acknowledgement of gratitude to one's father and mother for giving the body. Sesame seeds represent

the teachings, education and samskaras imbibed from the parents in seed form.

This ritual is a way of saying, “Thank you for giving us these things, and now we are returning them to you.” This kind of acknowledgement is received by the spirit as recognition of its contribution to the family, but avoids any kind of emotional link with them. When the spirit sees the offerings given in recognition of the effort it has made during life, it is satisfied, like the fulfilment of a destiny or karma. Usually, a *havan* or fire ceremony is also performed in order to infuse light into the spirit. It is like saying, “We are offering light so that you may become light and be liberated.” That is the whole purpose of the *havan*.

In meditation, the same process is followed. The thoughts and desires of people are like lassoes thrown around the neck of the spirit. In meditation, the image of the departed person is merged in fire so that the mental and emotional attachment is removed. These are the things done by the family members to help the departing spirit evolve, but the individual effort ends here. Once this process is complete, the spirit leaves the astral dimension and enters the atmic, universal or cosmic plane, where it knows no sorrow or pain, just peace and eternal life.

This process of helping the departed soul takes thirteen days in the short form, and one year and twenty-one days in the long form.

How can one help the soul of the person who committed suicide?

Swami Niranjanananda: Three people came to a railway station. As they reached the station, the train was just leaving. They started to run to get on the train. Two of them jumped in, and the third remained behind. He could not get on. The conductor said to these passengers, “You were very lucky to catch the train, take your seat.” The two passengers said, “We are not the travellers. The person who was supposed to travel was left behind. We had only to come to see him off.”

Once the passenger gets on the train, what can other people do about it? Once the soul has left the body, whether by natural death or by suicide, what can one do about it? One may offer a simple prayer that the next journey be more fruitful and the soul reach its destination. Once the soul embarks on a journey, it goes beyond the influence and reach of the people left behind.

One can purify one's thoughts to give them the strength of *sattwa*. With the strength of *sattwic* purity, one can encourage the soul to evolve and not regress, which will be useful.

Why is it important to perform the shraaddha ceremony for one's departed parents and ancestors?

Swami Sivananda: In the *Manusmriti*, which is a part of the Karma Kanda in the Vedas, the different duties of a person are given, according to his position in life and the order to which he belongs. *Manusmriti* is the code of conduct for Hindus. This scripture has imposed the *pancha maha yajnas*, five great sacrifices, as obligatory duties for a householder, and neglect of these duties entails a penalty. These five sacrifices are: (i) *deva yajna*, sacrifice to gods, (ii) *rishi yajna*, sacrifice to rishis, (iii) *pitri yajna*, sacrifice to ancestors, (iv) *bhoota yajna*, sacrifice to animals, and (v) *atithi yajna*, sacrifice to guests.

The shraaddha ceremony comes under *pitri yajna*. It is the sacred duty of the householder to perform this ceremony for his ancestors. The *pitris* are the forefathers, who dwell in the plane of *pitri loka*. They possess the powers of clairvoyance and clairauidience, and when mantras are recited, they exercise tremendous influence through their vibrations. When the *pitris* hear the mantras through their power of clairauidience, they are pleased. In shraaddha, the essence of food offerings is taken up by the sun's rays. The departed souls are pleased with the oblations and bless those who offer them.

In other foreign countries many people perform tarpan and shraaddha. The beneficial effects of such oblations have

been scientifically investigated. It is the imperative duty of all householders to perform shraaddha and tarpan to please the rishis and pitris. The *Bhagavad Gita* and the Upanishads bear testimony to the fact that the performance of shraaddha is very important. Those deluded individuals of perverted intellect who neglect to perform the sacred ceremonies, consequently suffer. They are misguided by false reasoning and logic. Ignorance is the root cause for this state of affairs.

The shraaddha ceremony is done once every year, as a day of the pitris is equal to one year of human computation. If one performs the shraaddha ceremony once every year, it is equal to the daily performance for the pitris. In their calculation their children here on earth live for only a few days, as one hundred years of human existence is merely one hundred days for them. Some people ask, "When the jiva undergoes transmigration after leaving this physical body and takes another birth, why is it necessary to perform the shraaddha ceremony for him? He is no longer in the heavens, so whom will the oblations reach?" In the *Bhagavad Gita* (9:20–21), Lord Krishna has made it very clear that those virtuous persons who perform sacrifices for the attainment of heaven attain those worlds of enjoyment:

*Traividyaa maam somapaah pootapaapaa yajnairishtvaa
svargatim prarthayante;*

*Te punyamaasaadya surendraloka mashnanti divyaandivi
devabhogaan.*

*Te tam bhuktvaa svargalokam vishaalam ksheene punye
martyalokam vishanti;*

*Evam trayeedharmamanuprapannaa gataagatam kaama-
kaamaa labhante.*

The knowers of the three Vedas, the drinkers of soma, purified of all sins, worshipping Me by sacrifices, pray for the way to heaven. They reach the holy world of the Lord of the gods and enjoy in heaven the divine pleasures of the gods. (20)

They, having enjoyed the vast heaven, enter the world of mortals when their merits are exhausted; thus abiding by the injunctions of the three Vedas and desiring objects of desires, they attain the state of going and returning. (21)

This establishes the theory of attainment of heaven after death, followed by rebirth in the mortal world after the exhaustion of virtuous acts. The enjoyments in heaven and the peace of the soul are enhanced by the performance of the shraaddha ceremony. The suffering in other worlds, according to the person's own actions, is also mitigated by the performance of the shraaddha ceremony by his sons. In both cases the performance of shraaddha is a great help.

The pitris remain in heaven, *pitri loka* or *chandra loka*, for a very long period. However, even if the individual takes another birth immediately after death, according to the theory of transmigration, the performance of shraaddha adds to his happiness in his new birth. It is the imperative duty of everybody to perform the shraaddha ceremony for their parents and forefathers. This should be done with great *shraddha*, faith, for as long as one lives. In the olden days the question of whether or not to perform the shraaddha ceremony did not arise at all because people were full of faith and had reverence for the scriptures. These days faith is dwindling into an airy nothing and the list of non-performers of shraaddha has increased. Others of wavering faith doubt the necessity of performing shraaddha and the good that will accrue from it.

LOKAS AFTER DEATH

What are the seven lokas?

Swami Satyananda: There are seven *lokas* or planes of existence. This does not mean planets; a loka or plane of existence is the domain of a quality of consciousness. The seven planes are: (i) *bhuh loka*, (ii) *bhuvah loka*, (iii) *swah*

loka, (iv) mahah loka, (v) janah loka, (vi) tapah loka and (vii) satya loka, and each plane has many sectors.

This earthly plane, called *bhuh loka*, is the gross or physical plane. Consciousness is divided into three states: waking, dreaming and sleeping. The waking state belongs to the gross existence, so this is the lowest plane. This physical existence on earth is the only form of expression and experience. Here one learns and grows by experience; one makes mistakes and works towards the perfection of one's lifestyle.

Satya loka, the seventh or highest plane, is the plane of the absolute, which corresponds to the plane of nirvikalpa samadhi. Satya loka is the aim of all yogas. It is reached through yogic concentration, meditation and samadhi. The yogi gradually awakens his inner consciousness, and ascends to satya loka, which is in the soul. It is that stage where the consciousness is devoid of all dualities and erroneous notions. It is only here that the purusha stands separately in his divine glory and divine power. It is here that he exclaims, "I am bliss absolute, I am knowledge absolute, I am Shiva, I am all." It is here that he really abides in his self. Satya loka is the supreme abode, the land of reality. This is the ultimate experience of all yogas.

What is chandra loka?

Swami Sivananda: Chandra loka is the heaven of the forefathers, or pitri loka. In chandra loka, the jivas acquire fine, brilliant bodies of gods. They become gods and enjoy the happiness of heaven, living with their *pitris* or forefathers for a long period. Those who perform sacrifices and charitable deeds with unselfish motives, *ishtapurtam*, such as digging wells, building rest-houses and laying out parks or gardens for the public, enter this loka.

Chandra loka is not the highest abode of eternal truth; it is a phenomenal universe. Those who dwell in this loka are bound by the law of karma, the law of cause and effect. Their stay on that plane is temporary, although it may last for

thousands of years. The pitris are bound by desires and have no knowledge of Brahman or the imperishable reality, so they cannot teach Brahma vidya to others. Even the dwellers of the highest heavens are subject to the laws of rebirth and reincarnation. He alone is free from birth and rebirth and transcends all phenomena who, after knowing the absolute truth, after realizing the supreme soul, becomes one with Brahman, the Absolute.

Where do people go after death?

Swami Satyananda: Almost all people go to the second and third planes, and by the force of their karma they come back to the earthly plane. The return is frequent from these two lokas. The first three lokas are very ordinary planes. Most people travel within these and then come back. But those who have elevated their consciousness by spiritual practice can go to the fourth loka, and those who have realized the deeper consciousness within them can go even higher.

Who goes to the heavenly worlds after death?

Swami Sivananda: The celestial worlds are obtained only by meritorious, virtuous acts, and not by birth or the merits of fathers and mothers. Only those who have earned great merit on earth can go to heaven. Atheists and untruthful people, and those who have not lived a life of asceticism and have not performed great sacrifices, cannot go there. Only those souls attain the celestial regions who are virtuous, who are of subdued mind, who have controlled their senses, who are free from malice, who practise charity, who have performed meritorious deeds or are heroic men bearing marks of battle.

The celestial regions are inhabited by pious people who have performed meritorious actions. When virtuous people die, they move towards heaven and live there. After death, they enjoy the pleasures of heaven as a reward for their merits, virtuous deeds, services and sacrifices. When their merits are exhausted, they return to earth. It is popularly

believed that the period of their sojourn in heaven may extend from eight to two hundred and forty years.

What happens after death to those who have lived a life of indulgence?

Swami Sivananda: After death the passionate man, one who has spent his life in sensual indulgence and whose mind is filled with lower appetites and strong cravings, enters *preta loka*, an astral world of gross density. He remains unconscious, in a sleep state, for a short time after death. Upon awakening, he finds himself in this world, where the sensual cravings, desires and appetites torment him greatly. He wants to eat, drink and enjoy with women, but cannot gratify these desires with his present body. He is kept in this world just like a prisoner in a prison. He is extremely unhappy, as he cannot gratify his passions, cravings and appetites on this plane. The senses are powerful, but there is no means of gratification. His misery is beyond description; he is just like a starving man.

In order to avoid *preta loka* and the sufferings undergone there, one should become wise and learn to control the senses. One should lead a well-regulated and disciplined life and not allow the senses to run riot. One should give up gluttony and not follow the philosophy of the flesh. Passions and appetites will only torment one after death, whereas by the practice of self-restraint, one will enter the regions of bliss.

By the performance of *shraaddha* one can help the sufferer in *preta loka*. *Shraaddha* helps to free him and enables him to pass on to *swarga*, the heavenly plane. The recitation of mantras during the *shraaddha* ceremony sets up powerful vibrations. Striking against the astral body, the vibrations break it and set the soul free.

What happens to the souls of people who have performed many negative actions in life?

Swami Sivananda: Sinners do not go to *chandra loka*; they go to *yama loka*, the world of punishment. After experiencing

the results of their evil deeds, they come back to earth. Hells are places of torture for the evildoers. The Vedas say that evildoers who do not go along the path of *devayana*, the path of the gods, to brahma loka by means of *vidya*, knowledge, or along the path of *pitriyana*, the path of the forefathers, to chandra loka by means of karma, are born and die often in low bodies. They become small creatures, such as insects, gnats, flies and worms, continually returning. Theirs is the third place, for it is neither brahma loka nor chandra loka.

Where do spiritual people go after death?

Swami Satyananda: A person with sattwic qualities, such as a saint, a yogi, or a bhakta, will go to the higher lokas, like mahah loka, janah loka, tapah loka and satya loka, which are much more subtle in nature. People who are sattwic, spiritual and reflective have a definite choice; they want this and they don't want that. When yogis die, they are fully conscious at the time of departing from the body. They do not become unconscious, either mentally or spiritually. Their ego remains in perfect awareness, and they leave the body with complete knowledge of the process of departure. When they are out of the body, in the unmanifest state of existence, they are fully conscious, not unconscious.

They know where to go; their destiny, movement and future are under their control. They see the different planes as they pass through and say, "No, this is not a good place; I am not going to stay here." They go further, as they have a choice and a standard, so they travel from loka to loka. Finally, if they come to janah loka, they will see a nice place, clean houses, nice people who are not rowdies, who do not drink and dance, so they will say, "This is a good place; I will stay here." After some time, they come to know of another plane, tapah loka, where the people are far better and they say, "Let me go there." They leave janah loka and go to tapah loka, and decide to stay there. They like the place so much that they live there for as long as possible. But they still have their own karma and will have to be reborn at some time. The *jivatma*,

individual soul, has to come back until it has exhausted its karma and attained *jivanmukti*, final liberation in this body, and *videhamukti*, freedom from the body.

Only highly developed souls go to the fourth, fifth and sixth lokas. They do not have empirical karma; they have spiritual karma. One must be evolved to have spiritual karma. One may be spiritually very high, completely unselfish and free of desires, but if one still has a higher *sankalpa*, or resolve, one still has the seed of karma. Matter is one vibration of reality, energy is another vibration of reality, and spirit is the third vibration of reality. Those who can feel all three are very few in this world.

A yogi must wait in mahah loka, janah loka or tapah loka for at least a few thousand years. They don't worry about the time, as it is a very relative factor. A thousand years here is one second there.

How are karmas exhausted after death once one leaves this earthly plane?

Swami Sivananda: During one's stay in the astral plane, the scenes of the past life are reviewed one after another, but with a difference; one is identified with all the actors in every situation. For example, one feels as one did while torturing a person, and one also feels the pain that the person who was being tortured felt. This process exhausts one's karma to a degree and provides useful lessons. Karmic purgation occurs when both the oppressor and the oppressed have been able to excuse each other. Retaliation only augments karmic bondage.

How long is the period between death and the next birth?

Swami Sivananda: Many people wish to know the exact period that elapses from the time of leaving the body and being born again. There is no definite period of time; the interval varies from person to person. It may be hundreds of years, one or two years or a few months; there is no hard and fast rule. Two main factors decide this issue: the nature of the

individual karma and the last impression before death. The soul has to reap the fruits of its karmas in heaven or hell. Those who work out some of their karmas on other planes in subtler regions take considerable time before entering a new body. Those who have done virtuous actions remain in heaven for two or three hundred years, before they are reborn on earth. This interval is very long, because a year of the earth time passes as a single day on the celestial plane.

However, if the attachment to the world is intense, a jiva may be reborn soon after death. If the soul has an intense desire to be reborn, it will take birth immediately. A very sensual individual with strong cravings, intense attachment or certain resolutions is reborn quickly. The jiva also resumes the thread very soon in cases where life was cut short by a violent death or a sudden, unexpected accident. If the jiva takes rebirth immediately, it can often remember many of the events of its previous life. It recognizes its former relatives and friends, and identifies the old home and familiar objects. But such cases of immediate rebirth are rare. Generally, the interval between death and rebirth for an average individual is a considerable period, when measured in terms of earth time. Great souls and spiritually advanced persons wait for a long time before reincarnating.

How soon after death does the soul reincarnate?

Swami Satyananda: Rebirth can take place after thirteen days. Rebirth is much quicker in the case of an ordinary individual. The more experience one has in spiritual life, the more selective one becomes, so it takes much longer to be reborn. The more the soul hankers for worldly things, the quicker the rebirth. Those souls who have deep attachment to life and are sensual enter any womb almost immediately. Being spiritually ignorant, they are not selective about parents or where they are to be born. Sadhakas, yogis and those who have left the physical body in total awareness may wait centuries before they choose to be reborn. They will wait for the right circumstances and the ideal mother and father,

possibly selecting parents who have already transcended ordinary consciousness.

An ordinary person who is really hungry will eat anything as soon as possible to fill his stomach, even if it is indigestible. But a discriminating person will examine the food in the finest shops until he finds the best. Similarly, after death, the soul may hurry back immediately to suffer again, or else wait for a better chance with the right parents. Those people who have a high standard of life and philosophy are generally able to make a proper choice about when and how they are reborn. Having made that choice, the soul has to wait in the queue for the proper mother and father.

Just as ovulation takes place in the feminine body, in the same way, the jivatma also begins the process of new life around thirteen days after the death of the body. The jivatma has to wait for thirteen days, as the seed has to mature and ovulate according to the laws of nature. It can be reborn on the fourteenth day at the earliest, but much depends upon its karma and the plane of consciousness which it has inherited and inhabited. For thirteen days after death the individual consciousness passes through the different realms or planes of existence on its way, then it goes to a particular plane of existence where it remains for a certain period, depending on its higher or lower karmas.

Different categories of people have a different transition from the body. Those who belong to the realm of *avidya*, ignorance, become unconscious at the time of death. The *sukshma sharira*, subtle body, and the *karana sharira*, causal body, close up. The individual consciousness enters a dormant potential state, like the seed of a tree. There is no awareness when the transition from the body takes place; one is totally unconscious of what is happening. The jivatma leaves the body like a seed, an unconscious capacity to be reborn, and goes to a particular loka or plane of consciousness, according to the gravity of its own karma, and stays for a period.

Can ordinary people access the other lokas in their current form and state of evolution?

Swami Satyananda: The first three lokas relate to the three dimensions of consciousness; they are known as the lokas of chitta. While living, one's mind traverses between these three. When a person dies, he has no gross body, but he has a subtle body and a causal body. It is the imperceptible soul that traverses the three planes, whether in this life or after death. There is only one difference between life and death: while living the spirit has a gross body, and after death the spirit is without this body. When one traverses the three lokas while meditating, it is not in the body. One may think it is in the body, but it has nothing to do with the body. The same applies after death.

The next four planes are lokas of non-chitta. When this chitta has been purified, its mortal nature is removed. It then becomes luminous and can go to the fourth, fifth and sixth planes. When it is completely *shoonya*, void, and free of all karma, it goes to the seventh and highest plane. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (8:16):

*Aabrahmabhuvanaalokaah punaraavartino'ryuna;
Maamupetya tu kaunteya punarjanma na vidyate.*

While all the worlds created by Brahma are limited by time and have their moment of dissolution, on reaching Me, there is no rebirth.

There is the possibility of coming back to human incarnation from the fourth, fifth and sixth lokas, but this happens only once in thousands of years.

How does one move from one loka to another?

Swami Sivananda: If several different kinds of lamps are placed in a room, such as kerosene oil, mustard seed oil, candle and electric, all the various lights will intermingle in the room. Just so, the seven lokas penetrate one another. Each plane is formed by matter of different degrees of

density, which penetrates the matter of the grosser plane below it. On the causal plane, matter is subtler than on the mental plane. On the mental plane, *swarga loka*, matter is subtler than on the astral plane, *bhuvah loka*. The mental plane penetrates the astral plane and extends further beyond it. The astral plane penetrates the grosser earth plane and extends beyond it.

Similarly, the vibrations of the astral plane are more rapid than those of the physical plane, and the vibrations of the mental plane are more rapid than those of the astral plane. The vibrations of satya loka, or Brahma loka, are even more rapid than those of the mental plane. In each plane the soul develops a new and higher sense of power.

When one passes from one plane to another, one does not move through space; one simply changes the focus of consciousness. One can have different kinds of vision through a telescope or microscope by using lenses of different degrees of potency or power. Similarly, different dimensions of consciousness correspond to the different lokas and function on different planes. For example, in the dream state the astral body functions and it relates to bhuvah loka, the astral plane. One can function on any plane in the subtler bodies and with subtler vision.

What is experienced in the highest loka?

Swami Sivananda: Brahma loka is the world of Brahma or Hiranyagarbha. It is also known as satya loka or Parabrahman. Above the abode of Brahma is Vaikuntha, the supreme seat of Vishnu, which is pure, eternal and effulgent. Those who go by devayana, the path of the gods, reach this plane. People who are addicted to sensuality or those subject to arrogance, covetousness, ignorance, anger and envy cannot go to that place. Only those who are free from conflicting emotions, who have restrained the senses and who are given to meditation and yoga can go there.

HEAVEN AND HELL

In the Hindu tradition, what is hell and what is its purpose?

Swami Sivananda: The Puranas have been very clear on the question of heaven and hell. The writers of the Smritis or law books have described the various hells and the many pleasures of heaven. Yogi Yajnavalkya mentions twenty-one hells, such as raurava, kumbhipaka, maharaurava, tamisra, andha tamisra and so on. The *Vishnu Smriti* describes the same thing. The *Srimad Bhagavata* describes twenty-nine regions of suffering, where the *jivas*, individual beings, are said to be born due to their karmas.

There are many varieties of hell that a jiva has to experience in accordance with the karmas which he does through sin and passion. There are hundreds and thousands of such hells for suffering sinners and transgressors of law. Those who control their senses and follow the path of nivritti, who absorb themselves in divine meditation, who are good, kind and generous, who care naught for this sensuous earth, who are intent on supreme *moksha*, freedom, are liberated beyond embodiment. Virtuous people reach the joyous heaven for enjoyment; others fall into one or other of these hells.

Suppose there is a wicked and inveterate drunkard given over to insensibility of every type and vice. After death he is led by the messengers of death to that plane of existence called hell and left to suffer the torments of a Tantalus, the tortures of moving in scorching deserts where his agonizing thirst is not quenched. Thus he is made to pay back the wages of his error and to purify his soul through suffering.

Hell is a particular locality which is walled off from the surrounding regions of space. A hell is a region of sharp, severe, intense pain. The evildoers suffer for a period there. The sinners get a thick body, called *yatana deha*, when they are punished there. The bad actions are worked out in that state, and the evildoers come back to the earth plane and get another chance.

The punishment in hell is not remembered by the soul when it is reborn. The punishment in hell is reformatory and educative. The permanent educative effect remains in the conscience. The innate fear that some souls feel at the sight of temptation of sin is due to the finer development of conscience in the furnace of hellfire. This is the permanent gain acquired by the soul. The soul is reborn with a keener conscience after being purified by the fire of hell, and can make better use of his faculties in the next birth.

According to the Hindu tradition, departed souls spend a certain period of time in heaven or hell in accordance with their karma before being reborn, while other traditions speak of eternal heaven and hell. Why is the idea of eternal life in heaven or hell unsatisfactory?

Swami Sivananda: The Hindu concept of heaven is different from that of the Christians or Mohammedans, who believe that heaven is eternal and permanent. The heaven of the Hindus is a place where the departed souls go to reap the fruits of their virtuous deeds. They remain there for some time until the fruits of their actions are exhausted and they come back to this world. The leading religions of the world, although much younger than Hinduism in origin, found it necessary to present the dreadful prospect of an eternal confinement in hell as well, so that people might desist from flying at each other's throats and respect social harmony, cultural values and peace. At the same time, a colourful lure of a joyous immortality in heaven was offered to serve the same purpose.

However, the doctrine of an eternal heaven and hell at once discredits the principle of evolution, because one is either abruptly condemned to hell without a slight chance of redemption or over-graciously suspended in heaven for eternity with an individualized existence. There is also no answer as to why one person should be flourishing and happy in spite of being wicked, and another should be drudging on in a life of want, full of wretchedness, in spite

of being virtuous. Further, the lifespan of a wicked person here on earth is nothing when compared with eternal life. If there is an eternal damnation in fire, it means there is an infinite effect produced by a finite cause, and this cannot be. Therefore, there cannot be eternal damnation or eternal punishment.

However, it is a theory that has long been exploited. Eternal damnation is an ungodly doctrine, a terror and nightmare for all ages. The terrifying description of hell was given to make people desist from doing wicked actions. God has not created humans to become everlasting fuel to feed the flames of hell; this is certainly not the purpose of His creation. If God were like this, no one would pay homage to Him, and then who could be saved? How many spotless people are there in this world? Who is of such untainted character as to receive a direct passport to heaven? Almost the whole population of this world would be roasted in hellfire, if such a relentless penalty were to become the common rule.

What is the experience of heaven in the Hindu tradition?

Swami Sivananda: On the physical plane one receives knowledge of objects through the five *jnanendriyas* or organs of knowledge: ears, skin, eyes, tongue and nose, but on the mental plane, in heaven, one does not hear, see and feel by separate physical organs. One has *divya chakshu*, the divine eye, which is an extraordinary new power or faculty. One sees, hears, feels and knows everything about an object instantaneously through this new mental eye. There is accurate and perfect knowledge of all objects. One is not deceived or misled by any external appearance; there is no misunderstanding. All the powers of all the senses are blended together in the mind. In heaven, the mind is a mixture or compound of all the organs, so it can hear, see, taste, smell and feel.

In heaven one obtains everything by sankalpa or willpower. If one thinks of a celestial car, it is there at once.

If one thinks of a place, one is there immediately. If one thinks of a person, he is there at once. There is no distance or feeling of separation. One reads the thoughts of others; hence, questions and answers are not necessary. The interchange of ideas is very quick. One can know the past and also the future. One is endowed with clairvoyance and clairaudience, and can simultaneously manifest oneself in various forms.

After death the individual soul departs with all of its desires and creates the objects of enjoyment by mere thinking. If it thinks of an orange, the orange is there and it eats the orange. If it thinks of tea, the tea is there and it drinks tea. If one wants to drink wine, eat delicious fruits, live with celestial damsels and move in celestial cars, one goes to a plane of consciousness where one will project all these ideas and make one's own heaven. Everyone creates their own heaven, according to their desire and imagination. Every individual has his own idea of pleasure. A drunkard dreams of a heaven where there are rivers of wine; this would be a kind of hell for a sober, pious man. A young man dreams of a heaven where he will have celestial damsels, celestial cars, fine music and dance. When that man becomes old, he does not want a woman. One's necessities and desires determine one's heaven.

Heaven is the counterpart of one's desires; it is a plane of enjoyment only. There are no painful or unpleasant elements or anything disgusting or inauspicious to be found there: no hunger or thirst, heat or cold, grief or fear, labour or fatigue, sin or repentance, old age or disease. Delightful fragrance wafts everywhere, the breeze is gentle and pleasant. There are countless celestial cars that move in the air. Delightful sounds captivate both the ear and mind. The inhabitants have resplendent bodies. There is no dirt of any kind: no sweat or stench and no excretion of faeces or urine. The dust does not soil one's clothes. Garlands do not fade. Those who dwell in heaven wear excellent garments full of celestial fragrances that never fade. They are free from envy,

grief, ignorance and malice, and live happily. Such is the bliss of heaven.

Why shouldn't one wish to go to heaven?

Swami Sivananda: The disadvantages of heaven are great indeed. Heaven is a place to reap the fruits of one's good karmas done on the earth plane. One cannot do fresh karmas there, but must enjoy the fruits of the former life until they are completely exhausted. Furthermore, one falls from heaven after one's merits are completely exhausted. The consciousness of those about to fall is stupefied and agitated by emotions, and fear possesses their hearts.

Moksha, or final emancipation, cannot be attained from heaven; one must come down to this world again to try for salvation. Therefore, one should not desire to go to heaven. One should try to reach that supreme abode of eternal bliss from where there will be no fall. One should seek that unfailing region where there is no pain, lamentation or agitation.

Heaven is a place of mental and sensual enjoyment. The enjoyments in heaven are more intense, subtle and refined, but they cannot give eternal peace and bliss. They wear out the senses. A wise person with discrimination and dispassion will never crave the enjoyments of heaven; he will never dream of an abode in heaven. *Raga* and *dwesha*, likes and dislikes, and jealousy are in heaven. Demons fight with gods.

Real, thirsty aspirants should ruthlessly ignore heaven. They should yearn for the final emancipation, or moksha. In heaven there is no idea of real, eternal bliss of the soul; the mind whirls in sensual pleasures. That is why one is carried away by thoughts of heaven or paradise.

If there is a clear understanding of the nature of the soul, there will be no craving for the enjoyments of heaven. The atman or soul is an ocean of bliss. The ocean of bliss or the fountain of joy is within. One should withdraw the senses, look within and fix the mind on the soul. All the sensual

desires will melt away and one will be immersed in the ocean of bliss.

People become disgusted with the world around them due to miseries, sorrows, disappointments, failures, loss of property, diseases and the death of dearest relatives. They dream of going to some place where there would be happiness forever, without any misery or pain, where they would live with their forefathers, with a perfect body. So they create heaven or swarga. However, there can be no eternal happiness in a finite plane that is conditioned by time and space. Eternal bliss and immortality can only be found in one's own self.

Life in heaven is very much like the life that one leads here, only a little happier. One may have a comfortable lifestyle in heaven, but it is not an eternal life of everlasting bliss. Everything which has name and form must perish; only the soul is immortal and eternal. That is why the sages and aspirants who are thirsty for truth do not long for the enjoyments of heaven. Vedanta teaches that the heavens are phenomenal and transitory, and attaches no special value to them. Even if one dwells in heaven for millions of years, these years are nothing before eternity.

Lord Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is within you," and Vedanta says the same thing. Real, everlasting happiness can be attained by realizing one's immortal soul. Eternal bliss is within, perennial joy is in one's innermost self. The little pleasure that one obtains from objects is only a reflection of the bliss of the soul. Within the atman one sees God face to face; there is no limitation or veil between oneself and the Lord. One lives in God; one lives in absolute and complete unity with Him. One is ever blissful. This is heaven.

One should abandon the idea of heaven. The idea of obtaining eternal happiness in heaven is a vain dream, a puerile idea. One should seek eternal bliss within one's atman through meditation. The immortal soul is free, eternal, ever pure, and ever blessed. One should assert one's birthright, proclaim one's freedom and be what one really

is, ever free and ever blessed. Everything in time, space and causation is bound, but the soul is beyond all time, space and causation. *Tat Twam Asi* – ‘You are That’. Everyone should realize this and be ever happy.

OTHER WORLDS

Why should one not dismiss the reality of other worlds or planes of existence?

Swami Sivananda: The empirical person believes only in sensory experience and is unable to rise above the dictates of the intellect. However, this does not mean that one should overlook those facts which are beyond one’s comprehension. One cannot assert that this planet earth is the only concrete reality and that other worlds are mere apparitions. The stars are not mere points of twinkling light in the sky, although one perceives them to be so. If I have not seen America, I have no right to deny the existence of such a country. There is intuitional and rational evidence for the existence of other worlds which are entirely different in nature and size to this one. In the *Yoga Vasishtha* (6(2):59:35) it is said:

*Vividhaanyapyanantaani svachchhaakaashaatmakaanyalam;
Anyonyamanyavritteeni na mitho’nyasthiteeni cha.*

There are endless varieties of creations in the unbounded womb of vacuum, all of different natures and manners; and there are no two things of the same character and feature.

The *Yoga Vasishtha* says that the earth is only an atom among many other larger worlds existing beyond human perception. The earth is one particular kind of world among many others, which differ from it in every way. One has no authority to discard the account given by Rishi Vasishtha that other worlds exist, which are made of different materials like copper, iron, gold, etc., filled with water and milk, and inhabited by serpents, animals, demons and so on. It is not

necessary that human beings alone should inhabit all worlds or that the same earthly conditions should prevail on all planes of existence.

The universe is a gradual revelation of the infinite absolute in various degrees of consciousness, which is inclusive of every sort of life and experience. The infinite is a great wonder and no one can say what things are thriving in its womb! This world is but one among the many within it.

What is your view on other planes of existence?

Swami Satyananda: There are other forms of incarnation which are not visible to the human eye. Evolved personalities incarnate in other realms of existence and experience a totally different life. They are like guardians, and although one cannot see them, they are constantly watching this world. They live and work only for the sake of helping mankind; their own learning processes are complete. If they needed to learn more, they would have incarnated in a human body on this plane. This plane of consciousness may exist on other planets or in other solar systems as well. There may be many planets in this universe, where there is a similar plane of consciousness, experience and expression. I don't know anything about them, but I've heard about them, read about them and imagined them.

In Hindu mythology, it is said that people can take birth on other planets. There are stories of people born in a land where everyone has wings, where people don't feel hunger and so on. There are many beautiful narratives from which one concludes that reincarnation is possible in other worlds which may be in this solar system or in another. Sometimes when one thinks about this, certain questions come to mind: "Do we live on this one planet only? Are we not also born on some other planet?" When the soul leaves the body, it could also leave this planet and be born on another.

There is another theory regarding this topic. There is existence in the body, but is there also existence out of the body? People experience existence in this body only during

the waking hours. However, at night when they go to sleep and dream, they do not know where they are. Maybe the spirit goes somewhere each night; it might go to India, Colombia or Europe and come back before one wakes up in the morning. The structure of the spirit is very complicated; it also has a different field of operation.

In fact, there must be incarnations out of the body. Where do the masters sleep? If the guru comes to the disciple, where does he come from? Where does Christ live? Where does Babaji live? Where does my guru live? Surely they must be living somewhere, for when one prays to them, they hear! And sometimes they come. Many people have had this experience, which means there is an existence or an incarnation where one can live without a body. One should not think that this earthly existence is ultimate and final. There are many more layers of experience.

The ancient cultures seemed to acknowledge life forms in other worlds. Is this true? How does the ancient knowledge compare with modern knowledge and yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: The Upanishads and the Vedas tell of life on other planets and even the Puranas, the mythological stories, refer to this. The ancients had a form of understanding which scientific minds do not possess. In the *Rig Veda*, the rishis talk about many different astrological conjunctions which happened fifty to sixty thousand years ago. Yet today, with the help of science, people are barely able to make out what happened, or how those conjunctions took place, in which zodiac signs, or how distant the stars were. The nearest star is so many billion miles and light years away, and that has also been mentioned in the Vedas. It is not known how this information was obtained.

The ancient Sumerians had knowledge of other worlds. The Babylonians had knowledge of other forms of life on the worlds they had visited, just as is mentioned in the Indian pantheon. In the Egyptian culture there is a great deal of evidence concerning life on other planets, and in the South

American cultures of the Aztecs, Mayas and Incas similar stories can be found. The ancient histories of the world, their scriptures, beliefs and ideas, are based on a higher form of knowledge than people possess today.

People are critical of extraterrestrial phenomena today due to lack of understanding. They fail to look at reality in its totality; even with all the technological advances and qualifications, they are not able to grasp even the first one percent of the totality. However, the ancients possessed this knowledge.

People today deal with facts and figures; they want to see definite evidence with their own eyes, which is not really possible in many cases. There are certain aspects of reality which can be experienced with the normal day-to-day consciousness, but there are other areas of reality which cannot be experienced with normal consciousness.

There was a scientist who said to a priest, "You talk about God. Why don't you show me where God is?" The priest simply replied, "Well, you talk about the atom. Why don't you show me where the atom is?" The scientist said, "We have instruments with which we can see the atom." The priest replied, "And we have methods by which we can experience God."

Take telepathy for example. Can anyone explain how telepathy works? Scientists are conducting research into it. They know that telepathy takes place between two people, but nobody knows how it takes place. It is like the story of the sun and the light, the cause and the effect: the process cannot be seen. Science is incomplete because it has only talked about cause and effect.

Philosophies like tantra and yoga, and many religions, have tried to shed some light in the direction of understanding the process involved. They say to do this meditation or that practice. The aspirant does it. He controls his mind. He becomes aware, observes, creates this and destroys that. This is a process; it is not cause and effect. If one can sincerely implement these practices in one's

life, one can develop the same type of intuitive perception that Sanjaya had when he was narrating the great war at Kurukshetra without actually being there. It is possible that suddenly, out of the blue, the third eye will open up.

It is a big blunder to try to understand everything through the intellect. How far can one go with the intellect? It is a very incomplete tool. The many unseen influences that are taking place cannot be understood through the intellect alone. No one knows how to control the various influences, but they think about them. People cannot even control their emotional outbursts. After getting angry, they feel sorry and guilty. When even these gross manifestations of the personality cannot be understood through rationalization, how can the supernormal be understood through the incomplete tool of the intellect?

It is better to know the cause and the effect first. The seed is the cause, the tree is the effect. The process of growth needs to be understood. Water is given, compost is applied and slowly the tree grows. When it is taken care of, it blooms; when it is not cared for, it simply withers and dies. In order for a tree to grow, a process of caring is involved. A certain amount of water has to be given, air has to enter the roots and light is also necessary. When a seed is planted, it has to be left in the earth. If it is taken out every day to see how much it has grown, it will never flourish.

Develop a basic understanding of cause and effect, and try to see the process of how the effect has evolved from the cause. How did this giant tree come up from a tiny seed? What type of care and preparation went into it? This is the first step in understanding the basic principles of the process of growth. It is important to know that Brahman is there - the cause; that the world is there - the effect, and by means of yoga one can find out the process.

Do such worlds as heaven and hell really exist?

Swami Sivananda: Why not? They are planes of existence, just like this world. There are many families within infinity. Earth, hell, heaven, animals, men, gods, devils are all its

children with varying temperaments. The absolute ranges from the lowest matter to pure bliss, *ananda*, and in between these the countless universes with their contents exist. They differ both in their individual nature and in the nature of their contents.

Beings take birth in one or the other of these worlds in accordance with their actions, which bear fruits that can be reaped only in that particular world. Only fire can give heat and only food can appease hunger. Similarly, only a particular condition and environment can enable one to reap the fruits of specific actions. The law of nature ordains that the soul should manifest within a body suited for its experience, determined by its past actions. As such, it is not unreasonable that a variety of conditions in the nature of the worlds should exist.

One should remember that the absolute reality is unseen. Therefore, hell is as real a world as this mortal earth. Similarly, there is an independent plane of existence called heaven, where the virtuous are led. Heaven and hell are regions which differ in the subtlety of the plane of their manifestation and in the degree of consciousness revealed through them.

Are heaven and hell external realities or do they exist only in the mind?

Swami Sivananda: They are as real as the earthly plane. The Puranas fully endorse the independent existence of separate planes called heaven and hell which subsist in their own right. Heaven and hell are not an imaginary fiction as conceived by the modern, rational mind. According to Vedanta, however, heaven and hell are planes of consciousness, so they are not entirely outside oneself. By purity, goodness, love and service, the human mind forms its own heaven around itself. By impurity, error, evil and ignorance, the mind creates suffering and sorrow for itself that go by the name of hell. As the poet Milton wrote, the mind makes its own heaven or hell within itself.

Man in his true nature is eternal, unborn, infinite, luminous, joyful and peaceful. Ignorance is the root cause of his suffering, limitation, individuality, error, birth and death. Self-realization, the experience of the infinite self within, releases man into the kingdom of infinite peace, freedom and bliss. From the transcendental viewpoint, there is neither heaven nor hell; they are creations of psycho-physical necessities. If one's mind is filled with sattwa, one is in heaven. If tamas and rajas dominate in the mind, one is in hell. Prison is a physical hell only; to live in this cage of flesh without practising japa and meditation is mental hell. The Puranas speak of hell as a place of torture, but there is no mention of hell in the Vedas or in Vedanta. From the absolute viewpoint, there is neither heaven nor hell; from the relative viewpoint, hell is as real as this world. For a person of discrimination, this world is also a hell. Heaven and hell, although not absolutely real, are not unreal as long as individuality persists. They are as real as any other plane of existence.

Hell is a state of absolute and complete separation from the Lord, wherein one does not feel the light of His love, holiness and truth. There is no illumination; it is a sunless world, *asurya loka*. In hell, all is chaos, darkness and torment, due to the reaction and retribution of sin that has been wilfully, perversely and unrepentantly done. The sufferings inflicted on sinners may be either an actual birth in hell regions or a life on earth with entanglements that cause one to undergo pain either directly or through the agency of others.

If one has belief in the scriptures, all the worlds and all the *tirthas*, sacred places, are existent in the human being himself. One can enjoy heaven or hell in this birth, if one so wishes. The greater the grossness, the more intense will be the torture and suffering until such time as the individual is refined and becomes fit for the descent of the Lord's grace by repeated processes of purification. If one wants to enjoy heaven on earth, one should go on purifying oneself by controlling the lower mind, desires and cravings; then all is bliss, all is joy and

all is happiness. However, if one gives free rein to the horses of the senses, yields to the prompting of the devilish mind and follows the path of adharma, hell itself will prevail here on earth, not elsewhere in some incredible region.

AFTER DEATH KARMA

Can departed souls show themselves?

Swami Sivananda: In the intervening period between death and new birth, especially if the person was psychically and spiritually developed, the departed spirit can frequently materialize upon the earth-plane, if the necessity arises. The spirit may take a human form, talk and make itself tangibly felt by touch. It is possible to photograph such an apparition. Such a materialized form is different to the astral body, which is not visible to normal vision.

The astral body is an exact counterpart, a subtle ‘double’ of the physical body and forms the vehicle in which the departed soul journeys after death. Astral consciousness cannot guarantee freedom from birth and death. Occultism and spiritualism can never give ultimate emancipation nor reveal the full secret of the beyond. Spiritual realization and knowledge of the self alone will reveal the mystery of life and death, and the life beyond death.

How do the spirits of departed siddhas and gurus continue to guide people in this bhuh loka?

Swami Satyananda: In between the first gross plane and the seventh absolute plane, there is a vacuum or space. Some spirits remain in between, and these are the spirits that one knows about. The spirits of the departed siddhas and gurus may also remain in this intermediate space, not because they are ordinary, but because they are concerned about their disciples. From that intermediate space, they can guide their devotees and disciples in an invisible way. This is a very interesting and complicated subject, as no one has been there so no one knows anything about it.

Is it acceptable to invoke a departed soul?

Swami Satyananda: When a person is dead, he is gone. The best thing for his soul would be to reincarnate. Nothing should be done to obstruct his reincarnation. The departed souls can be invoked through different mediums. They can be invoked into living bodies. They can be invoked in dreams, and of course, many times they come on their own. However, such invocation delays their evolution and brings them back again and again.

One should only invoke those great souls, gurus, mystics and yogis who have completed their evolution and have no need for reincarnation. They reincarnate only to help and guide others, not for their own enjoyment or wish fulfilment. They have no need to evolve further, so reincarnation is not important for them. These souls can and should be called, not others. This is the first rule in invoking the departed souls. The second is when such a great soul is invoked, the best way is through a picture or a statue. It is possible to invoke the soul into the body of a living person, but this creates great difficulty for that person. Therefore, the spirit of a yogi or saint should be invoked into a picture, symbol or statue. This invocation can be done by mantras or willpower, but the easier way is through devotion.

What is experienced after death?

Swami Satyananda: Many people wonder about the soul's journey: how, where and to which level does it go? Where does it live, how does it survive, does it get hungry and thirsty? Does it remember the surviving mourners? Does it remember its own children? Does it remember that it has left a widow or an orphan? Does it remember that it has to pay so much or collect so much from another person? Does it have any needs? In order to know about death and the existence thereafter, one should read the *Garuda Purana*. In India, this manual is read when there is a death in the family.

At the time of death, when the pranas are withdrawn and the soul or spirit leaves the body, the individual enters into

a state of experience. These experiences are, more or less, common. One may experience entering into a dark realm, without any idea of direction. One feels that one is moving onward at a tremendous speed and doesn't know which way one is going.

The spirit then enters the realm of light and there is enlightenment, effulgence everywhere. The departed soul does not see objects within that light, but it feels some sort of invisible direction and follows that unconsciously and unknowingly. However, those who are knowers of Brahman, the absolute or supreme reality, after leaving the body, first have the experience of dawn and then of white light. They experience going up and up and up, and the direction is north. The *Bhagavad Gita* (8:24) explains this as follows:

*Agnirjyotirahah shuklah shanmasaa uttaraayanam;
Tatra prayaataa gachchhanti brahma brahmavido janaah.*

Fire, light, daytime, the bright fortnight, the six months of the northern path of the sun – from spring equinox to autumn equinox – departing then these men who know Brahman go to Brahman.

Those who had lived a spiritual life, but were unable to complete their evolution, first enter into a smoky experience after death, then they experience night, dark night. They experience *krishnah*, the black, not the white colour, *shukla*. They feel that they are going down and down, and the direction is southward. This is how north and south is understood in the realms of spiritual life. These souls finally enter an area of very dim moonlight, *chandramasam jyoti*, like the second or third day of the dark fortnight, very little light. After entering that realm, they come back again into a mother's womb. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (8:25–26) it says:

*Dhoomo raatristathaa krishnah shanmaasaa dakshinaayanam;
Tatra chaandramasam jyotiryogee praapya nivartate.*

*Shuklakrishne gatee hyete jagatah shaashvate mate;
Ekayaa yaatyanaavrittimanayayaavartate punah.*

Attaining to the lunar light by smoke, night-time, the dark fortnight or the six months of the southern path of the sun – from autumn equinox to spring equinox – the yogi returns. (25)

The bright and the dark paths of the world are verily thought to be eternal; by the one – the bright path – a person goes not to return again, and by the other – the dark path – he returns. (26)

The word *nivartaka* here means ‘about turn, returning’. The return journey in Sanskrit is called *nivartan*. They come back. This is the third statement: light and dark paths. These are the *gatis*, experiences of movements of the mind, consciousness and spirit. White light and black darkness are the two paths, the two experiences, for the people who are born in this body, in this world. This experience is not confined to one type or race of people. Whether one is Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Zoroastrian, Communist or atheist, it doesn’t matter, the experience is the same. After death the experiences are twofold for all. One experiences the darkness and the other experiences the light. One category of people comes back; another category of people does not come back.

Not coming back means becoming one with the cosmic spirit. There are many categories of people who come back, bad and good both. In the Sanskrit language, bad and good are called *papa* and *punya*; in English they are called sin and virtue. The doers of good deeds also come back because they have the residue of karma. Even if one wants to be virtuous, to accomplish good acts and to practise dharma, these are also desires. Such positive desires remain as potential in the consciousness, and one still has to come back.

What is the second death?

Swami Niranjanananda: Death covers all three areas – time, space and object. Once the body goes, there is no object. One has to wait for the next object to be created. However, if one departs before time and one still has time left to live, one will have to come back. Time, *kaala*, is the factor here and, therefore, the Lord of Death in Hindu mythology is known as Kaala, Yama or Mahakaala.

Existence in time is not yet over. People who die clinical deaths go through an out-of-body experience, and when they come back they say, “We were told that our time was not yet up, to go back and complete our time.”

One may cease to exist in space, one may cease to exist as an object, but one will continue to exist in time. One may lose the body and not have a body anymore. It is cremated, buried, finished. One cannot come back to this body. One lives in time as a roaming spirit, a ghost, and fulfils one’s time. When one’s time has been fulfilled, one will die a second death, the death of a ghost.

Can you give an example of consciousness and karma continuing after death?

Swami Satyananda: A lady came to the ashram from England. She had suffered from terrible headaches since early childhood. When she had these headaches, she would become uncontrollable. She had gone to every kind of specialist in Europe to find a cure for her headaches and was under very heavy medication. I was travelling outside at the time of her arrival, so the ashram teachers taught her the yoga practices for relief of headache, such as neti, pranayama and other practices. Rather than improving, her headaches became worse and worse, and nobody could understand why.

When I returned, this lady came to me with about twenty bottles of pills, including different potencies of painkillers and sleeping tablets, so that she could sleep at night. I asked about her yoga, and suggested that she stop every practice. Then I asked her if she trusted me. She said, “Yes, I trust

you.” I said, “Can you do something for me?” She said, “What?” I said, “Do not take any of these medicines. Even if you feel that your head is splitting, don’t take even a single pill.” She said, “Okay, I’ll try.”

She managed to stop all of her medication with great difficulty for one day, but by the second day it was not possible. She came to me and said, “I have to take my medicines, otherwise my skull is going to crack.” The pain was so intense that she was swaying. She could not even stand upright due to the headache. I told her, “Don’t take any medication, no matter what happens. Even if you die, I will take care of you; I will bury you, but do not take any medication!” This lady really had a powerful will and she did not take a single pill. She used to scream and yell at night.

After four days, I called her again and said, “Listen, I want you to practise one form of meditation.” I taught her the practice. Still there was no improvement. She was shouting, screaming, running, clutching her hair. It was horrible to see a person in such pain and suffering! On the eighth night, while meditating, she became unconscious due to the pain. She went to sleep in that unconscious state. When she awoke the next morning, she did not have a headache for the first time in her life. She came rushing to tell me, “I have no headache. I feel so light, so happy, so joyous!”

I asked her what had happened. She said, “While doing my meditation, I felt a splitting pain so intense that I became unconscious. Then I went to sleep and I had a dream.” She identified the setting of the dream as a place in Wales. In the dream, there was a man who she felt might have been her in a previous life. He was a miner and would walk to the mine in the early morning with a helmet and shovel and start work. Suddenly, one day there was a rumbling noise. The miner looked up and saw the ceiling of the mineshaft falling down. There was instant fear and pain for a split second as the ceiling came down on his head, and then he died.

This lady’s pain had been carried within her consciousness as a seed impression, *samskara* or *karma*, and

after a gap of so many years, that samskara had begun to manifest. Since the cause of her pain was not physical, but due to something embedded in her consciousness, no external medication could help her. However, when she stopped the pills by pure willpower and the pain became intense and unbearable, the point came when she suddenly relived that whole experience in the form of a dream. After reliving the experience, the samskara was finished.

From this experience, one can understand that although the body dies something continues after death, which the yogis call consciousness. The thoughts that relate to the external, objective world may be finished, but the consciousness carries certain impressions from the past lifetime, which become one's samskaras and karmas in the next birth. Due to the external attention and attachment to the body and the pleasures of this world, one forgets one's identity with the consciousness and identifies with the external person, but the consciousness and karma continue.

After death, does the soul continue to evolve before reincarnating on the earthly plane?

Swami Satyananda: No. After leaving this plane of consciousness, one finds oneself on the intermediate plane. The soul remains quiet there in a dormant, potential state. There is no transformation on that plane; one cannot change the quality of life. Even if one stays there for thousands of years, one will be the same. Change will only take place when one is reborn. The soul or atman has to reincarnate in order to learn, suffer and evolve. There is nothing to learn in the intermediate state; the atman is like a seed in a bottle, waiting to be planted. The seed only sprouts and grows when it is put into the soil. After this life the causal body does not express itself; it remains in a state of hibernation, waiting for the right moment to reincarnate. After reincarnation, it undergoes the various experiences of life that one is familiar with. In order to evolve, one must be born on a plane where one can express and experience.

4

Reincarnation

LOGIC AND TRUTH

What is the process of reincarnation?

Swami Satyananda: In the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* there is a beautiful hymn about two birds sitting in a fruit tree. One bird was perched on an upper branch and the other on a lower branch. The bird on the lower branch constantly pecked at all the fruits, found each one bitter and spat it out. The bird on the upper branch was not interested in tasting any of the fruits and just watched its friend sampling and spitting. Finally, the bird from the lower branch looked up and said, “Hey, you are not eating the fruit!” The bird from the upper branch quietly replied, “My friend, I have already tasted those fruits and I don’t want any more. But why are you pecking at all the fruits without eating them? If you don’t want to eat bitter fruit, stop pecking at each one, because this tree only bears bitter fruit. You are not going to find that one fruit is bitter and another sweet.” The bird on the lower branch said, “Okay, my friend, let us leave this tree and find a better one.” So the story goes that they flew from one tree to another, visiting many trees. In each tree they had the same experience. Finally, evening came and they were exhausted, frustrated and broken. They alighted on an enormous tree with lots of leaves, but no fruit. The senior bird said, “My friend, we have now come to a tree where you are not going to eat and spit.”

The journey from tree to tree represents all the incarnations of the individual into a different human body. The senior bird represents the *atman*, or supreme consciousness, and the junior bird the *jivatman*, individual soul. Propelled by the desire for pleasure, this individual self migrates from one body to another in search of fulfilment. Each time it migrates, the *samskaras* and impressions are carried along with it, so the hankering persists, although the *jivatman* is endowed with a different physical body by virtue of its *karma* in previous incarnations. Every experience is indestructible and leaves behind a latent seed or impression in the individual soul. Trillions of *samskaras*, impressions or archetypes are accumulated during the thousands of migrations a *jivatman* undergoes.

What actually happens when someone dies?

Swami Satyananda: When a person dies, death of the physical body takes place. The moment the *prana* leaves the body, everything stops and the spirit departs in an unconscious state. It is said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (3:40:38):

*Jeevo hi mritimoorchaante yadantah pronmishanniva;
Anunmishita evaaste tatpradhaanamudhaahritam.*

The living soul retains its consciousness within itself after its pangs of death are over, but remains in a state of insensibility by virtue of its own nature, called *pradhana*.

Only a *yogi* or an evolved person can maintain consciousness during the transmigration of the soul. According to most theories, the soul remains in a dormant, potential state, like the seed of a tree, for a minimum of thirteen days. During this time it passes through the seven different realms of the universe, before going to a particular plane of existence, where it will remain for a certain period according to its *karma*. After that, reincarnation is possible.

How can the truth of reincarnation be discovered?

Swami Satyananda: There are only two methods to know whether there is reincarnation. One is to know through the practices of yoga, especially the psychic powers. The other method is logical epistemology and an impartial analysis of the natural laws of cause and effect.

How can one know that reincarnation is true?

Swami Satyananda: Everybody has to realize this for themselves. There is a constant chain of cause which relates not only to the body. It relates to each and every substance in this universe; mind, body, emotion, prana, feeling, consciousness, action, enjoyment, pleasure, pain, creation, destruction: everything is subject to this law of cause and effect.

When I was studying philosophy, there came a time when I did not believe at all in reincarnation. However, then I came in contact with a yogini, who was brilliant in her practices. She taught me how to practise sadhana in the middle of the night, in burial grounds where dead bodies are buried. At that time I was eighteen and she must have been around forty. She used to tell me about the principles of reincarnation; how the soul leaves the body and reincarnates in another to fulfil the laws of evolution. There is a law of evolution which does not end with the death of the body.

Then something happened. My elder sister was a medical doctor, who accepted the Catholic religion and became a nun. She was working in a tuberculosis sanatorium about seventy miles from my birthplace, and we had no association with each other. She died under mysterious circumstances, and we were told that she suffered from tuberculosis.

However, after many years, when I was deeply involved in spiritual practices, I realized and came to know that she did not die from tuberculosis, but on account of an abortion. This was later verified. I invoked her spirit, and she told me everything as to how she had to become a nun, how the abortion was badly conducted, how she died, where she was

consigned, where the body was disposed of and many other details.

After involving myself in many practices for a number of years, I came to know, not through books, but by experience, that at the time of death, the soul of those people who are not yogis and have not awakened their consciousness enters into a state of hypnosis; then their destiny and karma carries them. They are shunted away from this end to that, and finally they are born from a mother without having their own choice.

How do the laws of nature establish the doctrine of reincarnation?

Swami Satyananda: It would be illogical to believe that the impressions of karmas are destroyed with the death of the body. It is absurd and impossible to postulate a cause without an effect, or an effect without a cause. If there were only one birth, first and last, there would be no destiny. If one is born for the first and only time, the logic of destiny is a false thing; there can be nothing like destiny or fate. There can be no cause and effect, as cause and effect and destiny mean there ought to be many, many incarnations. When there is an egg, there has to be a chicken; one can't say that there is an egg and no chicken.

If one studies the laws of nature, and how in the course of millions of years nature changes and continues, how it is transformed and restructured, one will come to understand the basic theory of continuity of matter, or the continuity of an idea, or something else. What happens to the fruit tree? What happens to flowers? What happens to cereal? What happens to grass? What happens to the coriander seed? How were they born? How are they reborn? How does the same structure continue? Why does it not come to an abrupt end?

From a logical point of view, reincarnation must take place because the whole cosmos is evolving and reincarnation is a part of evolution. Not only humans, but plants, animals and minerals are continuously disintegrating and regenerating.

This great metamorphosis in the realm of matter is always taking place.

Those who have studied chemistry, physics or electronics will know what happens to matter after disintegration and how matter evolves year after year. Matter is eternal; there is no total destruction or elimination. When one does not accept reincarnation, one accepts destruction and annihilation, but logically, mathematically and scientifically matter is indestructible. Matter may undergo a change of form, but not a change of substance. If one takes a lump of mud and makes a small pot with it, one has changed the form, but not the substance.

When the spirit leaves the body, which is composed of the five elements: earth, water, fire, air and ether, the frame remains and undergoes the process of disintegration. As the whole cosmos is composed of these five elements, when the individual elements return to their source after death, they become universal. It always happens because an individual is a part of the totality. If one accepts the theory of the totality or macrocosm, one cannot ignore the existence of the microcosm. If one says there is an ocean, one must also accept the reality of a drop in the ocean. The drop is the microcosm and the ocean is the macrocosm.

If one has a cauliflower seed in one's palm, one does not have to prove that this seed also existed in the past. Similarly, the presence of karma and the fact that one exists proves that one has a past. A person is not the beginning and not the end, but a link in this long chain of events that is due to the law of cause and effect. The law of cause and effect has no beginning and no end.

Death cannot be the end of an individual. Death cannot be man's destiny; it is illogical. If death is the end of everything, it is unphilosophical. Death is just a process of metamorphosis. Milk changes and curd is born, curd changes and butter is born, butter is broken and fat is born. Matter breaks and energy is born. Energy breaks and knowledge is born. The idea that death is the end is illogical,

for transmigration can be seen in every other thing: a tree continues in another form, a seed continues to become a tree and the forces of nature go on evolving from one form into another.

Energy is never static, it is in constant motion, and as a result, matter also becomes transformed. This energy is in the form of a force. It cannot be seen with the naked eye, but scientists have proved the existence of energy and that matter emits energy. Matter radiates energy, whether it is nuclear energy or electromagnetic energy; energy is in a constant motion of transmission from the object.

Behind this matter and energy, there is another substance called the ego, that is, the individual spirit, the microcosm, but this ego is a part of the macrocosm. The atma or the ego is a unit of the macrocosm within each individual.

If one goes deep within oneself, transcending the awareness of this physical body, one will find that one is much more than this physical body. There is a greater, wider and much bigger form of individual existence. One can exist even without a body. The ego, the individual principle of *jivatma bhava* as it is called, can exist without this physical body. The individual has karma, and therefore inherits this physical body, operates through this physical body, creates a desire or wish or passion, fulfils it, enjoys that wish, that desire, that passion, and also suffers. One experiences through this physical body, but if one is capable, if one can do it, one can exist somewhere even without this body.

One can experience this ego throughout life, and in spite of change, in spite of the shift in time and space, the ego remains the same and there is no break in the continuity of this self-awareness. When a person goes to hospital and has anaesthesia, he is completely separated from time, space and object, but when he comes back out of the anaesthesia, he relates to that previous ego. That means that even during anaesthesia, the ego was surviving in the underground. It did not die; it was not separated or broken; the anaesthesia cast a temporary spell upon it.

When one dies, one doesn't just say that one is finished. How can one say that the soul, the spirit, the atma, is nothing just because it cannot be seen? There are many things that exist although they cannot be seen. In the same way the individual soul exists and leaves the body at the time of death. The body is consigned to the flames, but the jivatma is an entity, a *bija*, a seed, which leaves the body.

Many people say that when a person dies, that is the end of him. How can one say that one will be destroyed with death, and that death is the conclusion of the chapter of one's experience and that one will never experience life in this world anymore? How sad! How pessimistic! How frightening! It is frightening if anybody tells me that I shall not experience this life any more, because for me life is an open beauty. Life to me is an open challenge where I can grab as many things as possible. In this life I have become a sannyasin; in the next life I may become prime minister of England or the king or queen. Why not? I have immense chances for growth. I shall not die, and this is not the first time that I have been born. A man who can think so much, who can analyze so much, who has the understanding of himself and of so many things, who understands love and passion and hatred and fear – how can one say that he is a baby in this universe? Can one learn this in just sixty years?

Consciousness is the most important thing involved in the process of evolution. I am not using the words transmigration, incarnation and reincarnation. I am using the word evolution. I was a baby, then I was a child, then I was a young man, but I am the same; this is called evolution. How can one say that as a baby I was someone else, as a child I was someone else and as a young man I was someone else? Growth and evolution suppose one substance. Death is not the end of the jivatma, the consciousness, the self or the spirit; it is only the end of the body. Therefore, death is not the last thing in life. Death is just one event in life and life is eternal.

This present life is one link in a long chain. This is the fundamental philosophical truth which everybody has to understand.

What is transmigration?

Swami Niranjanananda: All scriptures say that only those people who attain Godhood or become one with God, whether through samadhi, moksha, nirvana, ecstasy or any other method, become immortal. Until that final state is attained, one is involved in the circle of birth and death, which is the cosmic mandala. In that circle, there comes a time, which is usually called death, when the spirit leaves the body,

To fully withdraw itself, the spirit has to draw in its strength and light. When the sun has already set, the light from the sun is still in the sky. It does not get dark instantaneously; it takes time for all the radiations of the light to disappear. Similarly, even when the spirit departs, while it is being withdrawn, the existence of the *asmi* nature, the feeling of 'I am', is still in the body and the organs. Only the intellectual consciousness has left the body, but not the instinctual consciousness. While the spirit is being withdrawn, the physical carrier is still alive and as long as the physical carrier is alive there is a possibility of the spirit coming back. It is like a rubber band being stretched out and then being pulled back in.

Rebirth is a natural process which keeps on happening until one uses the faculties of the spirit, the consciousness, to break the circle of birth and death, birth and death, which happens again and again. Transmigration can happen instantaneously or it can take place after a period of time. Today, somebody may die here and take birth again in a split second, provided the conditions are right. Other people may die and take birth after spending a hundred years or fifty years in a *loka*, a locationless dimension. In the case of transmigration, the same consciousness, the same identity becomes alive. Today one is known as Mr X, tomorrow there

is an accident. One takes birth somewhere else, but the identity that one has at the time of birth is maintained as that of Mr X, and the realization of the samskaras is that of Mr X. That is transmigration. The knowledge of the identity which one previously had is retained in the new birth, and one retains it in subsequent births.

CONTINUITY

What is the relationship between karma and reincarnation?

Swami Satyananda: In India, rebirth is called *punar janma*. If one believes there is no rebirth, no transmigration, it is futile to talk about karma. Karma and transmigration are the inseparable process of creation; they are interconnected and inter-related. There is no existence of karma without rebirth, and no rebirth can take place without karma. Therefore, every Indian philosophy talks about karma as the potential seed of creativity and the cause of the whole of creation.

What is the law of transmigration or reincarnation?

Swami Sivananda: Hinduism is based on two fundamental doctrines, the law of karma and the law of transmigration. The word transmigration means 'passing from one life to another'. The soul passes through a number of lives to attain perfection. This is technically called transmigration of the soul. According to Hinduism, life is one continuous, never-ending process. All change is only a change of environment and embodiment. The one great and fundamental tenet of most schools of Indian philosophy, with the exception of Charvaka, the materialist school, is the firm belief in the immortality of the soul. The soul is immortal and takes one form after another on account of its own actions. Death is only a necessary and passing phenomenon. Just as one moves from one house to another, the soul passes from one body to another to gain experience.

The doctrine of reincarnation is common to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. According to the theory of reincar-

nation, the soul enters this life after a long course of previous existences, not as a fresh creation, and will have to pass through many more lives before it reaches its final destination. If a person oppresses others, he will suffer oppression in another life and reap the fruit of the seed he has sown in this life. If a person injures the eye of another, his eye will be injured in another life. If a person breaks the leg of another, his leg will be broken in another life. If a person feeds the poor, he will have plenty of food in another life. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. There is no power on this earth that can stop actions from yielding their fruits. Such is the law of karma and the law of birth and death. Such is the circle through which one must pass on one's way. It is inexorable and unrelenting.

How are karma and rebirth connected?

Swami Niranjanananda: Karmas are acquired from the past and also created in the present. The eastern systems believe in rebirth. Semitic religions do not believe in rebirth officially, although Jesus Christ spoke on reincarnation. He said that his guru, John the Baptist, was an incarnation of Elijah. Christ recognized rebirth. The Christian Church is an institution, and I am not talking of institutions, but of the experience a person can have. Christ had that experience and he spoke about it.

The scriptures have also spoken about reincarnation. Sages and swamis have spoken about it and present-day scientists are discussing and researching it. Eastern philosophies maintain that if the impressions one gathers and what one accumulates in this life are not worked through and not released in this life, they are carried forward into the next.

It is like writing a word with a pencil on a blank piece of paper. The word can be erased, but the impression of the pencil will remain on the paper; the force which was applied will be seen in the form of the script even though the visible marks do not exist any more. What is written can never be

completely erased from the paper. The visual component can be erased, but not what has imprinted itself on the paper.

That is the karma that one comes with. The mind does not die. If the mind were different in the next life, how would memory of the past be retained? The present mind is not different from the past mind. I do not get your mind in my next life; I get my own mind in my next life.

One takes birth again and again only to experience and exhaust karma. Prakriti tries to attract the spirit towards matter, and the spirit, due to its inherent nature, wants to go towards God. When the spirit assumes a material body with the help of prakriti, it needs the senses and the mind, but when it makes the effort to unite with God, it does not need the senses or the mind, as this effort is not external, intellectual or conscious.

If one lights a fire, the flames will travel upwards. A tree will also always grow skywards. Similarly, the energies of the mind always try to rise upwards, but they are pulled down due to the influences of karma. The impressions that come as a package with a person in this life are called *prarabdha*. They are the invisible script on the paper that cannot be seen but which influences one's life. They are connected with the gunas. That is how the game in life begins. One takes birth, plays as a child, receives an education and stabilizes oneself professionally, but while playing this game, according to one's *prarabdha*, the prominence of the guna and the basic instincts, a mentality is formed, which is described as character or personality.

How can reincarnation be explained in simple terms?

Swami Satyananda: When a car is involved in an accident on the road, but nothing happens to the driver, what will he do? He won't stay with the useless car; he will find another vehicle and continue his journey. In the same way, the body is the vehicle of the spirit, soul, atman or consciousness. When one leaves the body, one has to take another body in order

to fulfil one's evolution. Life is continuous until the cycle of evolution is complete.

Reincarnation is a form of continuity, and continuity is a law of nature. In the realm of nature nothing is ultimately destructible; there is only metamorphosis or metempsychosis taking place. The body is not the ultimate; it is only a chariot or a motor car. This body must have a passenger, and the passenger is the self, the consciousness, with all the memories and experiences. After death, the consciousness migrates and goes into another life form in order to fulfil its evolution.

A human being is a transformed substance, but one has not always been a human being. One has existed for millions of years in different forms. That is a scientific conclusion, not the view of philosophy or religion. The transformation, metamorphosis, or 'getting out' of one incarnation into another is the law of matter and of creation. Creation is never static. Trees are not going to remain trees, stones are not going to remain stones and human beings are not going to remain human beings. The universe is not static; energy is not dead matter. Creation is a force, not dead matter. Where there is creation, there is energy, transformation, disintegration and destruction.

The human brain has trillions of archetypes that were inherited from the animal grandfathers: monkeys, elephants, dogs, horses and so on. They produced seeds of karma, creating impressions and producing habits and experiences. They created ripples in the ocean of life. When a dog barks or a horse neighs, it is creating. When a fish moves in the water, it is creating. Creation is movement. The whole universe is movement. All the waves of movement are products of certain events. An event took place and a reaction began, a sound was born and a reaction began, a tree bore fruit and the seeds were dispersed.

One lifetime is not enough to complete the evolutionary process. The belief in only one life for every person and every other kind of sentient being is illogical and untrue.

Metamorphosis and transmigration are endless. The seeds will transmigrate from the tree and more trees will be born. They will produce seeds and still more trees will be born. That is how mangoes and wheat have survived for thousands of years. This is transmigration of the species.

Why are individuals bound in the cycle of birth and death?

Swami Sivananda: The three knots that bind the individual to the cycle of births and deaths, *samsara*, are *avidya*, ignorance, *kama*, desire and *karma*, action. Desire is born of *avidya*. Man exerts to attain and enjoy the objects that he desires. During this activity he favours some and injures others through the force of *raga-dwesha*, love and hatred or attraction and repulsion. Therefore, he is caught in the wheel of *samsara* or transmigration. He has to take birth again and again to reap the fruits of his own actions. He repeatedly comes forth and dissolves through the force of his *karma*.

The individual souls have lost their independence, as they are bound by ignorance, desire and activity. Therefore, they are subject to the sorrows, miseries and pains of this *samsara*. Sri Krishna said that on account of the actions or *karmas* caused by desires born of ignorance, all creatures involuntarily come into being again and again to the coming of the day and dissolve at the coming of the night. This happens in order to create dispassion in their minds and a longing for liberation in their hearts, and to remove the fallacious belief that man reaps the fruits of what he has not done. This is expressed in the *Bhagavad Gita* (8:19):

*Bhootagraamah sa evaayam bhootvaa bhootvaa praleeyate;
Raatryaagame'vashah paartha prabhavatyaharaagame.*

This same multitude of beings, born again and again, is dissolved, helplessly, O Arjuna, into the unmanifest at the coming of the night, and comes forth at the coming of the day!

What is the role of desire and desirelessness in the process of reincarnation?

Swami Satyananda: After death there is a continuity of existence. The body is perishable and after death it is finished, but the spirit is immortal; it does not die. When the physical body dies, the astral body does not. The unfulfilled desires of every human being are converted into archetypes, which are much more subtle than radioactive or electromagnetic waves. These archetypes form themselves into a group, known as the astral body, which continues to exist as long as one desires it to exist. The astral body is just like the seed of a plant, flower or grain. The seed is a simple object. If the seed is cut open, one doesn't see the plant there. If a wheat seed is cut open, one doesn't see the wheat plant. If the seed of a fruit is cut open, one doesn't see the mango, apple, pear, or peach tree.

Everything is undefined in the astral body. It is dormant and potential. If one ploughs a piece of land, removes all the grass and filters the soil, after ten days many little green plants will come up, even without giving any water. The moment water is supplied, hundreds of plants will come up. Where do the plants come from? They come up from the soil, because the nature of the soil has those archetypes in it. These archetypes are known as the astral body, which somehow escapes death. The spirit does not die, and with the death of the physical body, the astral body is not able to fulfil its desires.

Supposing a person lives in Barcelona. He wants to start a big business there, but has not been able to, so he takes whatever money he has to another country and tries to establish a business there. In the same way, the astral body keeps moving, intent on the fulfilment of its individual desires. It establishes itself in a certain body, where it is born as a human being and fulfils its desires. Adi Shankaracharya said, “The *kamya karma*, action done with desire, becomes the cause of samsara by producing a body.” It goes on fulfilling these desires until the knowledge comes that the desires can

never be fulfilled. One has to stop somewhere. So one begins to lead a spiritual life, minimize the desires, do selfless work, purify the soul and eliminate the passions.

In this way, the astral body becomes free from desire, and takes another incarnation. Right from his birth, the person has a different way of thinking. He thinks like a monk or a sannyasin; he doesn't care for money or for pleasure. He is completely different from everybody. He has become partly liberated, but not completely. One day he has a vision of God, and thinks that God's love is final. Then he realizes everything as it is, not as it appears to be, but as God has created it. His soul is illumined and there is no further reincarnation for him. He is one with the supreme light. That is called final liberation, moksha or nirvana; it has many names. This is the simple philosophy of reincarnation.

What is the cause of transmigration and rebirth?

Swami Sivananda: Desire is the root cause of transmigration. Being a slave of desire, the individual soul attains those results to which its subtle body or mind is attached. Exhausting in heaven the fruit of whatever actions it did in life, it returns from that world to this for fresh work. Thus the individual who is a slave of desire transmigrates. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (13:21):

*Purushah prakritistho hi bhunkte prakritijaan gunaan;
Kaaranam gunasango'sya sadasadyon janmasu.*

The soul seated in nature experiences the qualities born of nature; attachment to the qualities is the cause of his birth in good and evil wombs.

What is the cause of rebirth after rebirth?

Swami Satyananda: According to Buddha the cause of rebirth is a karma, the hidden desire, or *vasana*, which clings to life. Craving is the efficient cause of rebirth. If there were no karmas, desires or cravings, there would be no transmigration.

Roasted seeds will not germinate, but unroasted seeds will sprout soon after placing them in the soil. In the same way, there will be rebirth when the potential of desire is inherent in the karma. However, when the karmas have been fried in the fire of *jnana*, knowledge, they have no further potential. Although the yogi may be moving and acting, eating and laughing, he has become free from desire, so there will be no rebirth for him.

What is the purpose of reincarnation?

Swami Sivananda: The life cycle of a person can be compared to that of a plant. The person grows and flourishes and finally dies at the end, but not completely. The plant also grows and flourishes and dies at the end, but it leaves behind seeds, which produce new plants. The dying person leaves behind his karma: the good and bad actions of his life. The physical body disintegrates and dies, but the impressions of the actions do not die. The person has to take birth again to enjoy the fruits of these actions. No life is the first, for it is the fruit of previous actions; nor is it the last, for its actions must be expiated in the next life.

One small life is a part of a long series that stretches behind and in front of each person. This short lifespan is quite insignificant. One gains a little experience and evolves only little. During the course of one life, a person does many bad actions and few good actions. Only few people die as good people. Perfection cannot be achieved in one birth. A person has to develop his heart, intellect and hands. He has to mould his character in a perfect manner. He has to develop various virtuous qualities, such as mercy, tolerance, love, forgiveness, equal vision and courage.

Each person has to learn many lessons and gain experiences in this great world school. One must achieve perfection in all the virtues in order to attain self-realization. Perfect self-purification and absolute freedom cannot be achieved without a plurality of lives. Lord Buddha gained experiences during several births, but he became a Buddha

only in his last birth. The purpose of transmigration is not reward or punishment but betterment and perfection. It prepares the human being for the ultimate realization, which frees him from the cycle of births and deaths. Rebirth is a necessity for the jiva's evolution.

Why does the soul transmigrate and take birth again and again?

Swami Satyananda: According to religion, the spirit comes back to suffer and to pay. In yoga, the soul comes back to evolve. There is nothing to be learned in the intermediate state, because the atman is suspended there in a state of hibernation, waiting for the right moment to reincarnate. The soul accompanies the jiva life after life. It has nothing to do with what it is doing. It is not the experiencer of pleasure and pain; it does not share one's joys and sorrows. It is a silent spectator of this voyage of life. One day, this transmigrating person will get a glimpse of the soul and that will be enough to make him a *jivanmukta*, a liberated being.

One does not see the soul. However, when one realizes the fruitlessness of all that one has been doing in the past, and is willing to look at an alternative way of living and thinking, one may get a glimpse of it. With this glimpse one is blessed forever. The higher soul follows one in every world only for that momentary glimpse.

Never think that the soul is transmigrating. Destiny, desires and passions, the will to live and enjoy are transmigrating – until that glimpse. The purpose of an individual should be to experience for a single fraction of a second 'I am all' or 'All am I'. It may take any number of births; it doesn't matter. Any further incarnation is dissolved by that glimpse. Just as a little fire can destroy barrels of petrol, or burn a mountain of cotton, in the same way, when the actual experience of the atman takes place, the future incarnations are destroyed. The time gap is contracted. This is the hypothesis that all the seers have made.

Is it possible to know ones past lives?

Swami Satyananda: According to Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, first a particular yogic art of concentration, meditation and absorption must be perfected. The totality of these three processes is known as *samyama*, complete control of mental concentration. For example, if one thinks about a rose or candle, one can enter that image. The object of meditation becomes clearer and clearer until personal consciousness is lost.

Then one must acquire knowledge of the moments of time and be able to discriminate between one moment and the next. It is not an intellectual process, but each moment is perceived separated by a void. Time is perceived in terms of moments, each one distinguished from the next. One can then travel backwards in a reverse sequence into the past. This is the way to enter into the lost time, as the memories of previous lives are with everyone. In the third chapter of Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (3:18), it says:

Samskaarasakshaatkaranaat poorvajaatijnaanam.

By direct perception of the impressions, knowledge of previous births arises.

By practising *samyama* on the impressions or *samskaras* seen during deeper stages of meditation, the subconscious and unconscious can be studied and one can have access to past births.

Can the DNA also transfer memories and experiences from one's ancestors?

Swami Niranjanananda: The genes, the DNA, are known as the building blocks of life. It is believed that one strand of DNA has more information in it than all the libraries of the world combined. This information has come with one's first emergence in this life. It can be said that genes or DNA are the photographic memories of the evolution of life. The original gene, the gene of Brahman, is also within

everyone. It is the first consciousness, which separated from its main body and became known as independent, individual consciousness or spirit. The experience of separation, the information of the original nature and how this new consciousness has progressed in the course of life is all contained in the genes.

However, there is also a locking system. Nature has ensured that one will only know and become aware of the present situation in life where one exists, in one time and one space. There is no awareness about the previous experiences and existences. This awareness of the past can be accessed by people who have evolved to a great extent. Buddha, in his incarnation as Bodhisattva, remembered his twenty-two past lives. He was able to be conscious of his previous existences and experiences. Sri Krishna had the same experience and said to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:5):

*Bahooni me vyateetaani janmaani tava chaarjuna;
Taanyaham veda sarvaani na tvam vettha parantapa.*

Arjuna, you and I have passed through many births, I remember them all. You do not remember, O chastiser of foes.

But nature has played another trick. It has placed knowledge and understanding of the future beyond the jurisdiction of human effort. In the genetic history, the past is blocked and the future is blocked. One has the ability to go into the past, but not many people know about it. However, one does not have the ability to go into the future. Therefore, it is preferable to say that the future and the past are blocked and cannot be accessed.

As understanding grows in the field of science and spirituality, maybe one day the information contained within the DNA strands will be understandable. That will be the time when human beings will be able to access the storehouse of knowledge and information to create further evolution and development in their lives.

EVOLUTION

How does reincarnation relate to human evolution?

Swami Satyananda: Human incarnation is a consequence of the evolution of nature. The advent of man, his life, his exit from the scene and his re-emergence, that totality is all based upon certain laws. Nature, or prakriti, is the governor, the director of this great universal law. In accordance with this law, man is born, undergoes pain and pleasure, and accomplishes his inevitable destiny. Prakriti has accomplished this model of man after trials and errors over 8.4 million incarnations. During the past incarnations in those 8.4 million bodies, nature supervised the evolution of consciousness herself. However, when she formed the human being, a special development emerged known as individual karma. After this, prakriti became somewhat free and independent.

Subsequently, man's own karma automatically decided his further evolution, pleasures, enjoyments, losses and gains. Prakriti only remained as a supervising force. With the emergence of the human incarnation, certain instinctive urges remained with man from previous incarnations, such as eating, sleeping, copulation and fear. In addition to these, nature developed in man the quality of *jnanam*, or awareness of his own existence in time and space, and in relation to the whole universe. On the basis of this awareness, man was capable of deciding his own course of action. He developed his own desires, ambitions and forms of pleasure and pain. Propelled by his desires, man created karma and established the course of his future incarnations.

What is the significance of karma in the course of human incarnation and evolution?

Swami Satyananda: The philosophy of reincarnation is the theory which relates to man's natural and spiritual evolution. There are two lines of evolution. One is called natural evolution, which is the evolution of the body. The second

line is spiritual evolution, which is concerned with the mind, emotion, intellect, ego and inner experience. After death, spiritual evolution continues in the same sequence. Natural evolution continues in its own sequence.

In the journey of evolution, karma undergoes three different stages. First of all, the *samskaras* and the experiences of life are received in the conscious mind. They are stored in the subconscious mind and, in the course of time, the accumulation is transferred to the unconscious mind. As long as these experiences are in the subconscious mind, they can project themselves in the form of dreams and daily actions. When these experiences and impressions are transferred to the unconscious, they express themselves either in deep meditation, or later in life, or even in another life.

The transmigration of an individual involves karma. The karma transmigrates; it is not destroyed. No experience can be destroyed and every event is an experience. The perception and cognition of every event is registered every moment in the deeper mind, which is part of the subtle body. There are three bodies: (i) the physical or gross body, (ii) the subtle body, containing the conscious and subconscious mind, which projects in dreams, and (iii) the causal body. These three bodies comprise the personality. After the death of the physical body, transmigration takes place and the *karmas* bear fruit at the right time. The impressions that are stored in the unconscious mind comprise one's fate or destiny, and these *karmas*, which become one's destiny, greatly affect life.

What is the role of karma in the process of life and evolution?

Swami Niranjanananda: When a seed is planted in the ground, it becomes a tree over the years. From the tree comes a new seed contained in the fruit. The fruit cannot be planted in the ground; it has to be eaten, and then the seed can be planted. This is the concept of life and karma. The seed of life is planted in the ground of action and is contained in the fruit of karma. In order to bring out the seed of life, the fruit of karma has to be eaten.

In this context, the normal understanding of human existence is only half the circle. One thinks that by expanding the sensorial, intellectual and emotional faculties, by opening the intellect and heart, one will become realized. This is only a process that allows one to exhaust the karmas and samskaras. Why does one meditate? To realize and exhaust one's karmas and samskaras.

Spirituality is the knowledge of this entire process of evolution, which goes through a full circle, from life to life, from pure consciousness to externalized consciousness and back to pure consciousness.

Where are humans in relation to the whole cycle of birth, death and rebirth?

Swami Satyananda: Before incarnating as a human being, one has already been through 8.4 million lives. One has existed in the forms of amoeba, vegetation, insects, birds, reptiles, mammals, demons and other subhuman incarnations. There are creatures of one, two, three, four and five sense organs respectively. In human beings, however, there is also the mind, intellect, ego, consciousness and jnanam, self-awareness. With evolution, the awareness of oneself in relation to time and space has emerged.

In all previous incarnations there is no self-awareness. When a dog barks, it does not know that it is barking; it is blindly following its instincts. As I am talking, I know that I am talking. I am a witness to my own action of talking. I know that I know that I know. This is the specialty of man; he is self-conscious. When a person is frightened, he knows that he is frightened and he knows that he knows that he is frightened. This self-awareness is exclusive to man. When a person thinks, he knows he is thinking, and he knows that he knows that he is thinking. A monkey may also think sometimes, but it does not know that it thinks.

The instinctive propensities for food, sleep, sexual activity and fear are common to both man and animals, but man has an extra faculty. There is a change in his intelligence and

personality. Man knows what he is and he knows when he receives knowledge by perception. Birds, donkeys and dogs behave instinctively. They do not know the differences in their surroundings, nor can they anticipate them. Sparrows wake up early, but they do not awaken knowingly; they just follow their instincts. When it gets dark during an eclipse, birds go to their nests, as they think it is evening. This is instinct or natural disposition.

Animals depend on instincts, but human beings depend on the mind. The human being has completed the evolution of the body. The human body is the last point in natural evolution. Evolution of the mind began when the human being was born. Human evolution is mental, intellectual and spiritual. After human birth physical evolution comes to an end, and spiritual evolution begins. Thus man will always be born as a human being, but he will be born as a different kind of human being with higher spiritual awareness.

In human life the body has reached the stage of perfection. Now the subtle power of the inner personality has to develop and reach the stage of perfection, where a human becomes a deva or a superman. The gross, coarse and undeveloped mind of animal life has to become more subtle, refined, sensitive, dynamic and all-powerful. Jnanam has to be developed more and more. As well as being aware that one is thinking, seeing or walking, one should know that there is something beyond this. Animals do not believe in God, nor do some people, but there is a difference. A man knows that he doesn't believe, he knows why he doesn't believe and he tries to discover the truth.

The birth of a human being is so precious and important. Besides fulfilling the conditions of the physical body, one has to make proper use of the faculty called jnanam. According to one's karma, one has a destiny. According to that destiny, one has to fulfil one's spiritual evolution. The rishis said that the human birth is the final and last. They also said this birth is one's greatest opportunity, and if one uses jnanam, one can evolve fast,

even in one lifetime and not have to worry about the 8.4 million steps.

The biological evolution of the individual is controlled by the laws of nature. Animals, including man, have no control over their biological laws. However, when one is born as a human being with a human mind, one has control over one's spiritual evolution. This means that man doesn't have to wait anymore at nature's grace; he can complete his evolution in one lifetime, if he chooses. A dog, ant, elephant, wolf or horse has to wait, but not a man.

Is there a way to evolve from lower to higher states of consciousness in one leap?

Swami Satyananda: A dog is an incarnation and there is metamorphosis when he dies. Maybe he is reborn as a dog, a horse or an elephant, and then he dies. After ten, fifteen or twenty incarnations, he becomes a human. What happened in between? What was that process that continued from the incarnation of a dog to a human? It is the flow of evolution, known in yoga as *samskara pravaha*, the flow of samskaras. Normally, the flow of evolution would take one hundred to two hundred years to transform a dog into a man. However, one who knows the laws of samskara pravaha can compensate, and maybe the dog can become a man instantaneously.

The same principle applies to materials and chemicals. In the natural course of evolution, atomic energy is released from uranium over two and a half million years, but it can be derived in five seconds by manipulating the process. In relation to the evolution of consciousness, yoga provides the means to understand the different levels of consciousness and to move from one level to another. The evolution of consciousness to a higher level requires a sudden jump from the present state to a high state of mind, known as *samyama*. This jump is possible through the mastery of yogic meditation.

Does karma sometimes force one backwards into less evolved forms?

Swami Sivananda: The vedic scriptures say that a man may become a deva, beast, bird, vegetable or stone, according to his merit or demerit. The Upanishads corroborate this statement. Sage Kapila, the founder of Samkhya philosophy, also agrees on this point. It is further said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (5:6:4):

*Kechitsvaraasanaatanubaddhaah karmaphaloditaah;
Tiryaktvaatsthaavaratanum yaanti tiryaktanum tatah.*

Some men who are fast bound to the chain of their desires, and have to feel the consequences of their acts, are made to descend to the state of vegetables from their brutal life, or to rise from it to animal life again.

When a man takes the form of a deva, only the divine qualities manifest, but all the human samskaras, habits and tendencies remain in a dormant state. In the same way, if a man takes the form of a dog, only the animal tendencies manifest and the human qualities remain suppressed. Some dogs get royal treatment in the palaces of kings. They move in cars, eat good food and sleep on cushions. These are all degenerated human beings.

However, certain schools of Buddhism and western philosophy teach that there is no retrogression after one takes a human birth. There is no necessity for a man to be born as an animal due to demerit. He can be punished in a variety of ways in the human birth itself.

What is the final stage of evolution?

Swami Niranjanananda: Nobody is sure whether there will be reincarnation. However, there is something known as evolution, and reincarnation can be seen as part of the evolutionary process. Settling karmas means understanding the process of life. When one goes to school, is given a task to do and fails it, the task has to be done again. If it is failed

again, it must be repeated, until it is right, until the pass mark is attained. One then moves into the next class, which denotes that the subject matter of the first class has been understood. The same rule applies to the evolutionary process.

According to the tradition, one has to pass through 8.4 million life forms. Yoga and tantra speak of twenty-one states of consciousness, whereas modern psychology speaks of three states of consciousness. These twenty-one states of consciousness represent the transformation of consciousness from gross to transcendental, from mundane to spiritual. While evolving through the various phases of consciousness, one accumulates karmas and exhausts karmas. One accumulates impressions and releases impressions. The path of spiritual life and disciplines makes one aware of the process of receiving and releasing. It gives one the ability to receive less and release more. This is the aim of the spiritual disciplines.

Reincarnation on this planet or on another planet, in this physical body or as a body of light, are matters for the human intellect. The body has the potential to become luminous, and this can happen after all the karmas have been exhausted and released. The body of Mirabai, the poet saint, became light at the time of death and dissolved in the image of Lord Krishna. When the mystic poet Kabir Das died, and the cloth covering the dead body was removed, the body had become a bunch of flowers, matter had disappeared. When Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the founder of the bhakti movement, died, his whole body disappeared into thin air. These are examples of people who lived only a couple of hundred years ago, and their case histories are well documented.

Does evolution always move forwards for a spiritual person?

Swami Satyananda: According to vedic philosophy, evolution is progressive, but sometimes a person may have to go back on account of karma. Even in higher incarnations, a yogi or a saint may uncover a certain experience which was somehow

missed or avoided. In order to fulfil his obligation to the laws of nature, he comes down to the lower kingdom to undergo that experience. Afterwards, he returns to the exact point where he left his forward journey. Suppose one is a spiritual person and wants to go high, but at a particular stage, one realizes that one still has passion or desire for sensory enjoyment or for revenge. What will one do? The same as a person on the way to the airport, who discovers that his passport has been left behind. One would have to turn back, finish the business and move on again. When one has to turn back on account of karma, it is only temporary and not for the sake of suffering, but experience.

Why is the earth so heavily populated?

Swami Satyananda: In the process of reincarnation, the lower beings constantly evolve according to the laws of nature, but the evolution of man depends on personal effort and striving for spiritual growth. In the past few centuries the animal kingdom has been evolving steadily, but man has not migrated from human existence. He keeps coming back on account of his spiritual degeneration, so there is overpopulation.

Again, some countries are densely populated while others are not. The overpopulated countries have more freedom and less tension. In those countries people are able to live simply with fewer regulations and less taxation. South America, Africa, India and other Asian countries are overpopulated, whereas Europe and North America are less populated. Fewer spirits are born in the more sophisticated and complex societies. Every human being has a natural tendency to migrate from a place of difficulty or discomfort. Likewise, the individual soul, after its interim in the causal body, chooses to be born into a society where there is a free flow of life.

Animals and other species have no choice in the matter of reincarnation, but human beings have some choice. The transmigration of people depends upon the quality of their karma, because they are free to act and to improve upon

their actions. A person has a choice of desires and their fulfilment. The instincts of hunger, thirst, sex, fear and insecurity are there, but they are not the deciding factors in one's life. Human incarnation is decided by the quality of one's karma and aspiration.

After death one is born again as a human being. However, in the course of time, if one's lives are dedicated to the spiritual purpose or higher consciousness, one will not be reborn at all. A yogi who has completed the cycle of evolution through the process of yoga has no karma and is not reborn. When the individual consciousness merges into the cosmic consciousness, rebirth stops. When the river unites with the ocean, it discards its individuality and becomes one with the ocean. In the same way, when a person renounces his individuality and becomes one with the universe, the cosmos or the absolute, there are no further cycles of pain and pleasure, birth and death.

In modern times few people are able to graduate to this particular sphere, for they are engrossed in sensual life and are not trying to become one with the universe. Human beings are not moving on, whereas animals are evolving, according to the laws of nature. That is precisely the reason for this population explosion. Here is a simple example: In the final year of university there are one hundred and fifty students; in the first year there are two hundred students, and in high school there are one thousand students. If all the three hundred and fifty students at university level graduated, and the thousand at high school level went on passing into the university, the number of university students would increase to one thousand three hundred and fifty.

There is a population explosion today because people have failed to pass on to a higher level of existence. People are static insofar as evolution is concerned. They are only concerned with the fleeting pleasures of life and engaged in the tantalizing sensations of the body. Human beings are not leaving the floor; while animals, who continue evolving by the laws of nature, are coming and coming. There is a big crowd

and a lot of rushing. When human beings do not realize the necessity of evolution, nature will teach them.

REBIRTH

What is the theory of rebirth?

Swami Niranjanananda: Evolution is an ongoing process. One goes to school and spends a year in each grade from primary class to twelfth class. Only when one class is passed does one move into the next class. This movement within the education system from one class to the next, to the next, to the next, is called progression.

The same progression in spiritual terms is called evolution. Whether one uses the term progression or evolution, it is the same. Ultimately, it is the maturity of the mind and consciousness which matter in life, not wealth and poverty, not success or failure, at the professional and social level.

One life with an average lifespan of eighty years is not enough to allow the evolutionary process to take place and to start it moving. Just imagine a pot which has been used to cook in for many, many months without being cleaned. One day the owner wants to clean it. Can it be done easily? No. He has to really use his strength and take time to clean the pot, as there are many layers of dirt and rubbish stuck to it. Similarly, in their lives, humans are one hundred percent conditioned beings, and evolution represents the unconditioning from conditions. That is the meaning of evolution: one has to uncondition oneself from the conditions that are being experienced today.

One way of living life is to accept the conditioning, qualities, limitations, abilities, strengths and weaknesses which are being experienced and identified as one's nature and character until the last breath is taken. However, there is another way. Improving oneself represents progression, evolution. The dross that is accumulated in the mind cannot be cleaned in one lifetime. People want to do everything, go on vacation, have a promotion, develop spiritually and

become enlightened, be prosperous and happy. There are too many distractions to fulfil. How can it be possible to remove the conditionings of such a consciousness in one lifetime while other factors are having a continuous influence? Evolution is an ongoing process and when maturity of consciousness is not attained in this life, one must again come back.

Until and unless one reaches the apex of evolution in human life, one does not migrate to another dimension. This is one theory, which can be accepted because of the evolutionary process that everyone and everything has to undergo. In his song *Bhaja Govindam*, Adi Shankaracharya said:

*Punarapi jananam punarapi maranam punarapi janani
jatare shyanam.*

Many times we take birth, many times we die and many times we rest in the womb of our mothers.

Given the large number of previous births, is it likely that people have met each other before?

Swami Satyananda: Having been through so many births, people must also have met each other in previous lives, not now for the first time. My sannyasins must have met me in my previous life in some form or other. People are not meeting for the first time. They have met each other many times, but not necessarily as human beings. Maybe once upon a time I was a frog in this well and you were a frog in that well. Maybe I was a bird and you were a falcon, I was a snake and you were a mongoose; I was a tiger and you were a deer, or I was a blade of grass and you were a flower. Life is infinite and eternal, and beyond all explanations.

Is there is a tendency to take birth in the same family or vicinity?

Swami Satyananda: Yes. Any pregnancy which takes place in the family within one year of the death of a person is sure

to be the soul of the dead person reborn. Therefore, among Hindus, when a person dies in the family, marital relations are absolutely cut off for one year.

How do experiences in past lives reflect in the current personality?

Swami Satyananda: Man is able to understand this life because of what he has already learned in previous incarnations. A person knows love, fear, jealousy, tragedy, faith or belief, because he has already learned about them in previous lives. Sage Vasishtha says in *Yoga Vasishtha* (5:6:8):

*Yasyedam janma paashchaatyam tamaashveva mahaamate;
Vishanti vidyaa vimalaa muktaa venumivottamam.*

The merit of prior acts follows one in his next state, and the learning of the past life meets a man in his next birth.

This also means the self is the same in all of its incarnations, even as the same person passes through kindergarten, primary school, high school, college and university. The classes are different, but the student is the same. The same individual continues through innumerable incarnations, retaining his individuality.

Each person, therefore, has a definite place in the universe. When a seed of wheat is sown, it grows into a wheat plant, not a rice plant, because of its specific property. The property or nature of each person is not the body; it is the karma, the quality of thinking, feeling and acting. The thoughts, feelings and actions are the expression of the ego, which is constituted by the experiences in many, many lives. The experiences of a person in different lives constitute his knowledge. In every birth one has experienced different forms of love and hate, happiness and unhappiness, desire and aversion. All this constitutes one's individuality or personality.

How does the soul move from body to body?

Swami Sivananda: Every soul is a circle. The circumference of this circle is unfathomable, but its centre is located in the body. Death means a change of this centre from one body to another. As the caterpillar reaches the edge of one leaf, it projects itself and catches hold of another leaf; only then will it leave the first leaf entirely. Similarly, the soul visualizes the body to come before leaving the current body completely and taking hold of another support. The jiva moves about in this way from one body to another with all of its *samskaras* and *vasanas*.

When the soul passes from one body to another, it is enveloped by the subtle elements, or *tanmatras*, which are the seeds of the new body. The subtle elements accompany the soul. When the soul departs, the chief prana departs after it and then the other pranas depart. They cannot stay in the body without the basis, substratum or support of the subtle elements, the base for the moving pranas. After death, there can be no enjoyment until the prana enters another body. The essence of the elements is the vehicle of the pranas. Where the subtle elements are, there the organs and pranas are; they are never separated. The soul cannot enter the new body without the prana. The pranas and the senses remain quite inoperative at the time of death in order to accompany the departing soul.

The view of Samkhya is that the self and the organs are both all-pervading and only begin to function in a new body on account of karma. The view of Buddhism is that the soul alone, without the organs, begins to function in a new body, the new senses being formed like the new body. The view of Vaisheshika is that the mind alone goes to the new body. The view of Digambara Jainism is that only the soul flies away from the old body and alights on the new body, just as a parrot flies from one tree to another. All of these views are incorrect and opposed to the Vedas. The soul leaves the body accompanied by the karma, as well as the prana, the *sukshma bhootas*, or subtle elements, and the subtle senses.

Just as a goldsmith takes a quantity of gold and fashions it into a newer and better form, so the self throws off this body and takes on another newer and better form. The jiva has adopted the whole universe as its means to realize the fruit of its actions. It goes from one body to another to fulfil this object. The ordinary soul has no freedom; it has to accept its destiny. Only after liberation or partial liberation is the soul able to choose to some extent. It is difficult to tell at what point the soul begins to decide its future incarnation, but it starts much before the final stage of realization.

Is it possible for the soul to choose its parents or the circumstances of its next birth?

Swami Satyananda: I personally feel that there is a conscious being within each person, which goes with the individual soul after death and decides which particular body it should inhabit. This is the conscious principle in man himself. However, only a few people with higher consciousness can choose their parents.

At the time of death there are two types of people. One type becomes totally unconscious. The mind, senses and awareness become dormant, as if one were sleeping. The spirit leaves the body in a dormant, potential state, like a seed, which is being tossed hither and thither, with no choice of its own and no awareness of itself. According to the gravity and quality of karma, nature moves the seed from the old body and puts it into the mother's womb at the proper time. Here one has no choice and has to be born according to karma in the womb of a mother, whom one may like or not. There is a cosmic force that keeps the records of individual karma and the birth is decided according to these.

The second kind of soul maintains inner awareness at the time of death. These are the yogis and one should be like them. At the time of death, they leave the body with full awareness. They are not sorry; they do not lament or cry. They don't feel sad about the things they are leaving behind: mansion, cottage, horse, bullock cart, motorcycle,

television. They just leave with total awareness. Since these people are aware, they can decide where to go. Nature does compel them to a certain extent, but they have control over the laws of nature also, since they are aware. These souls have a choice. They choose their parents, which family they will be born into and for what reason.

How do good and bad karmas determine the experience after death and the next life?

Swami Sivananda: Karmas are of three types: good, bad and mixed. It is said in the *Shiva Purana*, “Evil karma takes one to hell, good karma to heaven, and mixed karma results in human birth. The human birth is good or evil, according to the proportion of the mixture.” The results of good karmas are purification of the mind, removal of dross and happiness in the higher regions during the period in between death and rebirth in this physical world.

If the karma is of an exceptional nature, the person may even be made an office-bearer of authority in the higher regions, or come back again to earthly life with facilities for further purification of the mind. However, the person is not bound to return again to human birth if his karma is free from attachment and if he has progressed on the path of jnana or the higher path of bhakti, having faith in the revealed truth that he and the divine object of his devotion are in fact one in the self.

The results of bad karmas are that the mind becomes more and more impure and there is suffering in the nether region or hell during the period between death and rebirth. If the karma is bad, after suffering in the nether region, the soul is made to take birth in this world in the lower animal or vegetable kingdom as part of his punishment. In some cases these lower births immediately follow the previous earth life. After undergoing sufferings in hell or as a sub-human life form, the jiva again assumes a human body and is placed amidst unfavourable environments for its onward progress. These bad environments or impediments to

advancement are the consequence of previous errors and misdoings.

Mixed karmas are partly good and partly bad. The results are that the mind becomes more pure in some respects and more impure in others. The soul suffers for some time in hell, and enjoys for some time in the happy regions above. Afterwards, one generally takes birth here again as a human.

What determines the circumstances of one's next birth?

Swami Sivananda: The next life will depend upon the karma performed in this birth. The habitual study of abstract problems will result in another earthly life with a developed power for abstract thinking. Flippant, hasty thinking, flying from one object to another, will bequeath a restless ill-regulated mind in the following birth.

The birth and environment are determined according to the nature of the person's desires. The prarabdha karma places one in environments favourable for the gratification of desires. The soul is dragged to the place where it can obtain the objects of its desires. A man may be born in India as a poor Brahmin. However, if he desires to become a multi-millionaire, his next birth may be in the USA. Suppose a poor intelligent boy in India has an intense desire to go to England for his ICS examination, but his desire cannot be fulfilled in this birth. A rich lady in England with no child has an intense desire to get an intelligent son. The poor boy in India may obtain his next birth in London as the son of the rich lady. In this way, the previous strong desires of both will be gratified. God gives suitable surroundings for growth and evolution according to the nature of one's desires.

Desire drags one to such places where the desired objects can be obtained. This is the law of nature. If a person entertains holy desires, he will be placed in holy surroundings, such as Uttarkashi, Varanasi and the Himalayas, where he can perform austerities, sadhana and meditation amidst sages and saints, and obtain self-realization. If a person

entertains unholy desires, he will be placed in surroundings like Paris and Hollywood, where he can go to cinemas, restaurants and ballrooms. It is left to the individual to select the desires, whether holy or unholy. If one wants to shine in divine glory and live like a god-man, one should select holy desires. If one wants to move as a man-beast in the slums of Paris, one can select unholy desires.

When and how does reincarnation actually take place during pregnancy?

Swami Satyananda: Reincarnation does not occur at the time of conception. When the ovum is fertilized, a receptacle is formed, but the soul does not enter that receptacle until the fourth month of pregnancy. At that time the actual reincarnation takes place. Conception is similar to constructing a house. The bathroom, bedrooms, kitchen, sitting room and laundry have to be ready before the owner moves into the new home. In the same way, everything has to be made ready before the spirit enters the body. Reincarnation only occurs when the spirit enters the foetus. In the womb, the spirit becomes fused with the personalities of its father and mother. During the ninth month, for about fifteen days before birth, the spirit becomes aware of its previous existence and personality. Then these memories become inaccessible and the spirit is only aware of the womb and its own existence. This continues until just one or two days before birth takes place.

Is it possible for a male to take a female body in the next incarnation?

Swami Sivananda: Yes, the soul must undergo various experiences in different bodies for the fulfilment of its karmas and desires. In the male body the soul experiences the qualities of boldness and strength, and in the female body patience, mercy, kindness and forgiveness. Moreover, a man is not totally male or a woman totally female. There are also some feminine qualities in the man and some masculine

qualities in the woman. There are also certain animal traits in both. There is the dog, donkey or jackal in some, and the tiger in others. Therefore, one should develop divine qualities in order to evolve quickly and become divinity itself.

How does the law of karma influence one's rebirth?

Swami Satyananda: By the law of karma one becomes subject to a hereditary condition or predisposition, such as disease. If one has been leading a life of austerity and purity, one will be born in a family or dynasty which can fulfil these spiritual aspirations, where one will receive cooperation in all spiritual endeavours and the family members live together under strict moral discipline.

The person who has done everything right and awakened himself spiritually is born just where he finished the previous life and proceeds from there. Otherwise one forgets, just like everybody else. As a baby one knows the faculties that are awakened within. But, as the physical and mental bodies develop and become capable of action, one forgets the duties towards oneself and slips into materialism: eating, drinking, sleeping and dancing. These things may have to be done, but the ultimate goal should always be remembered while doing them. Otherwise, one is like any pig or fish.

Do spiritual efforts in this life assist in the next life?

Swami Sivananda: Even the least effort in the direction of yoga never goes in vain. A person will realize the fruit of even a little yogic practice. A person who succeeds in the practice of the first three limbs of raja yoga: yama, niyama and asana, in this birth will begin his practice from the fourth limb, pranayama, in the next birth. The Vedantin, who has acquired the first two means of viveka and vairagya in this birth will start his practice in the next life from the third means, namely, *shadsampatti*, the sixfold virtues *shama*, *dama*, *uparati*, *titiksha*, *shraddha* and *samadhana*, equanimity, self-control, sensory withdrawal, endurance, faith and constant concentration on reality. Arjuna asked in the *Bhagavad Gita* (6:37):

*Ayatih shraddhayopeto yogaachchalitamaanasah;
Apraapya yogasamsiddhim kaam gatim krishna gachchhati.*

O Krishna, he who is unable to control himself although he has faith, and whose mind wanders away from yoga, what end does he meet, having failed to attain perfection in yoga?

In reply to this question of what happens to sadhakas who have not reached the state of yoga in this life, Sri Krishna says (6:41–43):

*Praapya punyakritaam lokaanushitvaa shaashvateeh samaah;
Shucheenaam shreemataam gehe yogabhrashto'bhijaayate.*

*Athavaa yoginaameva kule bhavati dheemataam;
Etaddhi durlabhataram loke janma yadeedrisham.*

*Tatra tam buddhisamyogam labhate paurvadehikam;
Yatate cha tato bhooyah samsiddhau kurunandana.*

Having attained to the worlds of the righteous and, having dwelt there for everlasting years, he who fell from yoga is reborn in the house of the pure and wealthy. (41)

Or he is born in a family of wise yogis; but a birth like this is very difficult to obtain in this world. (42)

There he comes in touch with the knowledge acquired in his former body and strives more than before for perfection, O Arjuna! (43)

It all depends upon the stage of evolution, the degree of purification of the pranas and nadis, the degree of vairagya and the yearning for liberation. Therefore, the sadhaka should not be discouraged if he fails to attain final liberation in this birth. Even a little practice for a short period will give more strength, peace, joy and knowledge.

Those who practised yoga in their previous lives, but were unable to accomplish the final result, are born in a

shuchi, holy and clean, family with *sri matam*, good qualities. They are not born in a wealthy house, because a rich family may not be a clean family. Those yogis, who have a higher consciousness from the previous life, are born in a family of clean people, who have sterling qualities, or else they are born into a family of yogis, who practise yoga and spiritual life. But such families are rare, and one does not find them in every nook and corner.

Religious, faithful, compassionate, ethical and moral people can be found in plenty in this world. But people with an evolved consciousness, who can see beyond matter, who can feel the subtle energy and vibrations, who are aware of the higher mind, are very rare.

How do yoga practitioners come back?

Swami Satyananda: Those who have practised yoga or spiritual life sincerely in their previous birth, but were unable to accomplish perfectly because they died somewhere in the process, are known as *yoga bhrashta*, which means ‘incomplete yoga practice’. The word *bhrashta* means ‘broken’, where the yoga practices were broken. Just as a person is going to school and suddenly his studies are interrupted, in the same way, the yoga practices are also interrupted. This interruption can take place at five levels: at the level of annamaya kosha, when one is completely gross; at the level of pranamaya kosha, a little higher; at the level of manomaya kosha, the mental level; at the level of vijñanamaya kosha, the psychic level; and at the level of anandamaya kosha, the blissful level.

These five koshas denote the level of evolution of a yogi. Although a person is practising kriya yoga, japa yoga, or any kind of yoga, his evolution may not be high. One may be a yoga practitioner, but one’s soul may be at a grosser level due to the evolution of consciousness. However, there is a continual progression. A person who is practising yoga at the annamaya kosha level in this life will practise at the level of pranamaya kosha in the next life.

What is the meaning of the two paths, Uttarayana and Dakshinayana?

Swami Satyananda: Hindus believe that when one dies during *Uttarayana*, the six months from January 14th to July 14th when the sun moves towards the north of the equator, one attains the passage of light, which is described in the *Bhagavad Gita*. When one dies during *Dakshinayana*, the six months from July 14th to January 14th when the sun moves to the south of the equator, one goes by the dark passage. These passages also refer to the two paths the consciousness can take when it enters the inner dimension, after transcending the senses, mind and intellect.

When the consciousness penetrates beyond these three levels of the senses, mind and intellect, one experiences the light of dawn of a whitish hue, *agni*, fire, and *jyoti*, light. This means the soul is going on the path of *Uttarayana* from which it will not return to the material plane. It also means that one has transcended the *indriyas*, or the sensory level of mental and intellectual awareness, and is in the region of the self, the spirit. When one has the experience of smoke, *dhumra*, night, *ratri*, and darkness, *krishna*, it means that one is going through the path of *Dakshinayana*. On this path, one will have the experience of moonlight or dim light, then one will be reborn again and revert to normal consciousness. Regarding these two paths the *Bhagavad Gita* concludes (8:27):

*Naite sritee paartha jaananyogee muhyati kashchana;
Tasmaatsarveshu kaaleshu yogayukto bhavaarjuna.*

Knowing these paths, O Arjuna, no yogi is deluded!
Therefore, at all times be steadfast in yoga.

The first meaning is that the person who dies in between Capricorn and Cancer goes the way of *Uttarayana* from which there is no return, and the person who dies in between Cancer and Capricorn goes the way of *Dakshinayana* and has to return. The second deeper meaning is that these are the

two paths of consciousness, which can be taken, according to one's karma.

My guru once told me, "If you insist on the spiritual path now, you will go through Dakshinayana, and you will have to come back. Wait for forty to forty five years and purify yourself. Free yourself from the passions that are lurking in your mind. Clean yourself up in any way you can. Then, one day, sit down and meditate. Beyond the senses and mind are the buddhi and atma. When you go beyond that, you will not come back."



5

Liberation

SAMSARA

What is freedom?

Swami Sivananda: Real freedom is freedom from birth and death, from the bondage of body and mind, freedom from the bonds of karma. Real freedom is freedom from egoism and desires, from thoughts, likes and dislikes, from passion, anger, greed and pride. Real freedom is identification with the Supreme Self. Real freedom is merging in the Absolute.

What ends the cycle of samsara?

Swami Sivananda: The cycle of births and deaths is called *samsara*. The astral body is the subtle body, existing within the physical body, like the bladder of a football. It is the exact counterpart of the physical body, made up of five organs of action, five organs of knowledge, five pranas, mind, intellect, chitta and ahamkara. The astral body continues after the physical body dies. It comes out of the physical body after death and goes to heaven. The eventual death of the astral body through knowledge of the eternal is what frees one from the cycle of births and deaths.

What is the best attitude to maintain towards the cycle of birth and death?

Swami Satyananda: There is a prayer: “Lead me from untruth to truth, from mortality to immortality – *asato ma sat gamaya, mrityorma amritam gamaya*”. Here mortality and immortality should not be confused with dying physically. The words mortality and immortality have no reference to the body. The cycle of birth and death is mortality. One is born because of this cycle; one comes into existence again within the limited areas of life. When the cycle of birth and death stops, the individual self, the atma or jiva, becomes free from the fetters of mortality and remains the same all the time, without any change or fluctuation, without having to be born in this body or that.

The jiva, ego or individual principle is the seed which migrates. The jiva creates a body for itself, lives in that body and works out a few karmas, but accumulates many more karmas than it works out. The store of karma remains in the subconscious mind, and it is a great obstacle in the path of enlightenment. Therefore, the right attitude to maintain is that the process of migrating from one body to another should be stopped.

Why do people search for liberation?

Swami Niranjanananda: The prarabdha or destined karma with which one comes into this life gives a goal, a purpose to life, an independent direction to develop. Many times the natural direction of life is diverted by the impositions of education, society and family. One moves in a diverted direction and accumulates yet another set of karmas.

Everybody has come into this world to be free and to follow their own destined path. The spirit seeks freedom and will avoid situations where it is bound. If there was no demand by the spirit to liberate itself from gross karmic bondage, the concept of moksha and mukti would never have arisen. If there was no ill health, medical science would never have come about. Medical science arose because

people wanted to be free from the effects of ill health. The spiritual sciences developed because people wanted to be free from the gross materialistic associations and bondages of society, the family and the world.

A person plays many different roles in life, a certain role as a child, a different role while growing up and another when reaching maturity. The process of thinking changes, the attractions, ideas and beliefs change. In each situation and condition, the person behaves differently. The difference in behaviour is maturity. Maturity is developing a better understanding, while lack of understanding is immaturity

What is the general direction of evolution in the process of reincarnation?

Swami Sivananda: The human body is only the vesture and dwelling place for the immortal soul. The soul can certainly put on new vesture and inhabit another dwelling place in order to develop and realize the divine plan and purpose in a better way than before. The creator has planned it so. The soul of a depraved and corrupt human being is given a new training in another body. The evolution of all beings is towards a better condition. Evolution towards a higher life and not deterioration to a lower life is generally the law and principle of nature, although there are exceptions to this rule. Armed with the little virtue and divinity gained in the previous existence, the soul enters another life to increase, improve and develop that original stock.

There is now a more favourable response of the person, who is controlled by the soul. He responds to the goodness, truth, holiness and other attributes of God. The enlightening influences of yogis and sages, their lives and teachings, assert themselves more and more in the new life. The light of God is more sought after and gravitation towards it becomes stronger and stronger. The person becomes more able to see God and hear His voice. In this way the process of transmigration continues through many lives until the soul is purged of all its impurities. Having acquired true and full knowledge of the

imperishable Self through the practice of yoga, one attains final emancipation and enjoys perfect, eternal bliss. The soul has now attained perfect union with the Supreme Self.

How is one freed from the cycle of birth and death?

Swami Sivananda: One should do good actions, entertain sublime, divine thoughts and build a positive character. One should have the pure, holy desire for liberation from the wheel of birth and death. A person's character is built by his thoughts. As one thinks, so one becomes. If one thinks nobly, one will be born with a noble character. If one thinks badly, one will be born with a bad character. This is the immutable law of nature. Desire determines the sort of objects one will have in the next life. If one desires wealth or power very much, one will get it in the next life. But money and power cannot give eternal bliss and immortality, so one must choose carefully.

The person who shuns worldly desires ruthlessly will soon be freed from the rounds of birth and death. The man who does not desire, never transmigrates. The person who is free of desire and for whom all objects of desire are but the Self merges in Brahman. Mother Prakriti's work is over. She unravels all the experiences of this world from the individual soul, and takes it higher and higher through various bodies until it regains its essential divine nature and merges in the Supreme Self or Parabrahman. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (7:19):

*Bahoonaam janmanaamante jnaanavaanmaam prapadhyate;
Vaasudevah sarvamiti sa mahatmaa sudurlabhah.*

At the end of many births the wise man comes to Me,
realizing that all this is the innermost self, Vasudeva.
Such a great soul is very hard to find.

How does one transcend the cycle of birth and death?

Swami Satyananda: As long as one has desires and karma, the seed is intact and it will be reborn. When there are no desires or passions, the seed is still there, but it is totally

fried and will not germinate. When desires are fulfilled by following the path of *vairagya*, non-identification, there are no more rebirths. Just thinking and wishing is not enough. When one wishes and desires, one creates a seed, but that seed can be destroyed. Strong willpower is needed to unite with God, guru or the saints. One has to desire light. One cannot please God and mammon at the same time. There is attachment for life, objects, relationships and insignificant and irrelevant things. At the same time, one wants to unite with Him, but one can have only one master, not two. When one desires the things of the world, they are one's masters. Attachment is the master and passion is the master. They are the master and one is the servant. Therefore, the whole lifestyle has to be redesigned.

The purpose of life must be decided; it cannot be materialistic. The most important thing is to try to discover why one is here. One may not get the answer fast, as the mind will be deluded again and again, giving all the wrong answers. But if one continues to search for the answer, one will realize that the purpose of man's incarnation in the physical body is spiritual. The human body is nature's greatest miracle, for in this body one can discover the light, eliminate the animal tendencies and realize the highest form of creation.

Swami Vivekananda said, "This Earth is the *karma bhoomi*, the sphere of karma. Here alone man makes his good or bad karma. Therefore, man is the greatest being in the universe, and this world of karma is the best place in it, because the greatest and best chance for man to become perfect is only found here. The angels or gods all have to be born as men if they want to become perfect. This human life is a great and wonderful opportunity."

When does one attain moksha?

Swami Satyananda: Reincarnation comes to an end only when there is no karma. Every day one goes back to the shop, back to work, because one has obligations. If one has

no obligations, one won't go back. The individuality will incarnate again and again, as long as there are obligations. Individuality and eternity are not two different things. Individuality is one stage of manifestation. The electricity generated in a generating station takes many forms. Electric light is a form of electricity. In the same way, individuality is a manifestation of eternity. If one has desires and passions, one has karma. Even if eternity is experienced, one will come down to fulfil those desires and obligations. But when all the karmas are finished and the obligations are over, there is no return. This is called moksha, nirvana or liberation.

Liberation does not mean renunciation of action or karma. A liberated individual continues to act on the physical, mental, intellectual, emotional and sensory planes. He may plough the land or perform any kind of work, for it is the ego that binds an individual, not the actions. When the ego is involved in an action, the karma becomes personal property and the owner must accept responsibility for it. A liberated individual has dissociated the ego from his actions, his karma. He works like a servant or a shop assistant. Although a shop assistant works with his body, mind and intellect, he does not hold any responsibility for what is happening in the shop. The owner of the shop, on the other hand, is unable to detach his ego from the shop and is therefore responsible for the good and bad karmas that accrue from it. The profit belongs to him and so does the loss, as his personality and ego are involved. When ego is involved, there is karma; when there is no ego involvement, there is no karma.

JIVANMUKTI

What is jivanmukti?

Swami Satyananda: The word *mukta* means 'free'. When the rope which binds no longer binds, one becomes a mukta. With the release from prison, one becomes a mukta. Therefore, *mukti* means a state in which there is no bondage.

When all karmas are finished, a person becomes a *jivanmukta*, liberated while living. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (5:25):

*Labhante brahmanirvaanamrishayah kshinakalmashaah;
Chhinnadvaidhaa yataatmaanah sarvabhootahite rataah.*

Those sages obtain absolute freedom or moksha whose sins have been destroyed, whose perception of duality has been torn asunder, who are self-controlled, and intent on the welfare of all beings.

The cycles of happiness and unhappiness, birth and death, incarnation and reincarnation are finished with the attainment of this state.

A *jivanmukta* is a liberated person, who has finished his karma and is free. He is no longer bound by desires and is not contaminated or touched by attachments. A *jivanmukta* sees himself pervading each and every speck of creation. For him duality does not exist. He sees himself in all and all in himself. This is the highest experience, for it is the experience of unity, totality. A *jivanmukta* is one who has an absolute and complete vision of his true and immortal nature. Such a person is liberated. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (6:29):

*Sarvabhootasthamaatmaanam sarvabhootaani chaatmani;
Eekshate yogayuktaatmaa sarvatra samadarshanah.*

With the mind harmonized by yoga, he sees the self abiding in all beings and all beings in the self; he sees the same everywhere.

What does a *jivanmukta* do after attaining realization?

Swami Sivananda: A *jivanmukta* cannot disappear as soon as he realizes Brahman. If that were the case, how would it be possible for aspirants to receive spiritual instructions? It is known that aspirants receive spiritual instructions from *jivanmuktas*. The liberated person lives in the world, but he is not of the world. He has no idea of enjoyment or enjoyer.

He may be absorbed in samadhi or he may work like an ordinary man of the world. Adi Shankaracharya says in his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, “If he be engaged in worldly action, he does so with a view to set an example to the masses. If he has renounced worldly life, he performs deeds only for bodily maintenance.”

Internally the jivanmukta has the *bhava* or mental attitude: ‘I am a witness’, *sakshi*, ‘I am the non-doer’, *akarta*, ‘I am the non-enjoyer’, *abhokta*. He has no egoism or individuality, so he is not bound by karma. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (13:29):

*Prakrityaiva cha karmaani kriyamaanaani sarvashah;
Yah pashyati tathaatmaanamakartaaram sa pashyati.*

He sees who sees that all actions are performed by nature, *prakriti*, alone and that the Self is actionless.

So radiant and compassionate is he that he is the ocean of mercy, love and peace, a Buddha or Christ. When he identifies himself with Brahman, the jivanmukta casts off this body just as a snake casts off its skin. He may give up his body in any place, at any time. Just as the falling of leaves and fruits will not affect the tree itself, so also the dropping of the body will not affect the atman, which survives like the tree.

The *sanchita* or accumulated karmas depend upon ignorance, *avidyasraya*; the *kriyamana* or current karma depends upon egoism, *ahamkarasraya*, and the *prarabdha* or destined karma depends upon the physical body. In a jivanmukta ignorance is destroyed by the dawn of knowledge, so the sanchita karmas are destroyed. He has no egoism, so the kriyamana karmas are destroyed. However, he still has a body, so the prarabdha karma has to be worked out.

A jivanmukta suffers due to prarabdha, but he does not feel it because he has elevated his consciousness to that height. When ordinary persons undergo the same suffering, they weep and cry; some even commit suicide or lose their mental balance. The body is subject to disease, but the

jivanmukta does not experience any pain. Onlookers may wrongly imagine that the sage is also suffering, but that is a serious mistake. Ramakrishna Paramahansa had cancer of the throat, Buddha had chronic dysentery, Sri Shankara had piles, but they experienced no pain.

Pain and quarrels always exist in the world. The jivanmukta has to face these, but he does not mind them. He rises above them and laughs and smiles, as if they were unreal. He knows that there is neither pain nor quarrel in the atman. He identifies himself with the all-pervading Brahman, and so the three kinds of karmas are destroyed.

After attaining liberation, how long does the individual continue to live in the human body?

Swami Satyananda: The individual continues to live for a long time even after the merger of the ego consciousness, and that state is called *jivanmukti*, liberation in life. The individual continues to live because he has certain karmas of the world, but these are the higher karmas, such as acts of compassion for all living beings like Buddha and many others have shown. In order to fulfil divine acts of compassion, they live on for some time. Then the state of *videhamukti*, or final liberation, comes where the physical consciousness is also dissolved. After attaining that state, the individual lives on for only twenty-one days; he leaves the body and there is no further rebirth.

What are the two states of freedom?

Swami Niranjanananda: Freedom from karma is only attained by those who have renounced or developed detachment from everything around them. Nothing influences them. When this kind of detachment takes place from karma, two states are attained. One is *videhamukti*, freedom from the confines of the senses, and the other is *jivanmukti*, freedom from the bondage of karma in life. A person living in society can only go up to freedom from the sensory attractions, not beyond it. No matter how much one meditates, or how much time

one spends in the ashram, the conditions in which one is are living and growing will only allow one to become free from the influences of the senses.

A sannyasin, however, is alone, nobody in front, nobody behind, nobody on top, nobody below. If there is determination and conviction, and the necessary effort is made, he can attain jivanmukti, freedom from life, as there is nothing to tie him to the ground except guru and God. Swami Satyananda proved that. He was free from his karmas in the year 2003 and for six years he lived as a jivanmukta, a person who could no longer be bound by life or the attractions of life. This indicates a state of mind where the state of *abhinivesha*, the fear of losing one's identity and dying, has been overcome. Nobody wants to die. Everyone fears death, forgetting that birth is one spectrum of life and death is another spectrum of life. All are chasing a mirage in the desert. This is the failure of understanding in people who do not understand the principles of spiritual life.

FREEDOM FROM KARMA

How many people have attained the level of jivanmukta?

Swami Satyananda: Only few people in the history of mankind have remained free from karma. There haven't been many jivanmuktas, who become free and remain free from karma. I can count them on my fingers. Out of the billions of people who are born, only a few attain this highest state of freedom from karma. When there are no samskaras, no seeds, there is no motivation or compulsion to do karma. A jivanmukta is not someone that every century can produce. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (7:3) it is said:

*Manushyaanaam sahasreshu kashchidyatati siddhaye;
Yatataamapi siddhaanaam kashchinmaam vetti tattvatah.*

Among thousands of men, one perchance strives for perfection; even among those successful strivers, only one perchance knows Me in essence.

What are jivanmuktas and videhamuktas?

Swami Satyananda: Jivanmukti, embodied liberation or liberation in life, is a slightly lower state than videhamukti, which is disembodied liberation. A jivanmukta maintains his individuality while living in the body because of one desire, the desire to uplift all living beings. A jivanmukta is free from all self-oriented desires. He doesn't want to achieve, accomplish, accumulate or hold anything for himself. Behind whatever he does or thinks, there is only one motive – compassion for all. As a result of this desire he maintains his individual status, and after his death he is again reborn.

How does videhamukti differ from jivanmukti?

Swami Niranjanananda: The Samkhya philosophy describes the concept of mukti or moksha, liberation from the cycle of birth and death, and mentions two related states. The first is jivanmukti. As soon as the self realizes the difference between purusha and prakriti and merges into its own nature, it becomes free. In jivanmukti the body continues to live, as the past karmas are not destroyed at this stage. The karmas accumulated from the past have to be gradually discharged, so the body remains. Like a potter's wheel it takes time for the rotation or cycles of life to gradually slow down and stop. The momentum accumulated in the past by the rotating wheel of karma carries on, although the purusha is separate or free. Although the consciousness is free in a jivanmukta, the body and other attributes carry on with the momentum of the past karmas until those karmas are totally dissolved.

Further births may be necessary to complete that karma. Samkhya believes that even after being liberated, one may be reborn to fulfil past karmas, but still have a liberated mind. For example, there is the story of Jada Bharata, a great king who did sadhana and attained moksha. Afterwards, he took several births in order to exhaust the residual karmas. In each birth his mind was totally detached from the body, but still the subtle body, *sukshma sharira*, had to go through its own processes until the karmas accumulated by its past

bodies were finished. For an ordinary person, however, further identification on the level of the gross body creates more bondage.

The second concept is videhamukti, where the accumulated karmas are totally annihilated. In this case, the body dies and the liberated soul remains in the bodiless state. After the karmas are exhausted, the sukshma sharira merges with consciousness, purusha. Only then is videhamukti, complete freedom from the cycle of birth and death, attained. The sequence of rebirth stops there. In the absence of karma there is no further rebirth for the videhamukta.

Why is a jivanmukta still subject to past karmas?

Swami Niranjanananda: A person does not see his own face until he looks in the mirror. At that time he says, “That is what I look like,” and he forms an image of himself. Afterwards, even if he doesn’t look in the mirror again, he retains that impression of himself. Similarly, purusha is never involved with the manifest forms, but due to association with prakriti, it is caught in the wheel of life and death due to identification.

If one’s consciousness was liberated due to contemplation and meditation, and one were to enter samadhi, still the body would have to fulfil its span of life. The body contains those images and impressions which hold it together. This has been described in the *Bhagavad Gita* as *deha buddhi*. The personal experience of evolved beings is that the body still pulls them back. The same images carry on and life continues until those impressions are totally cleared. In this life one may suddenly realize, “Oh, that is not me!” One may then start erasing, but one cannot wipe the entire blackboard clean in one sweep, as the blackboard is always bigger than the duster. Although one may be free and have the right attitude, still one can only eradicate one samskara or karma at a time. It takes another sweep to remove another samskara or karma, and one life is necessary for each sweep of the board.

In jivanmukti, one returns and brings one's original, clear state. There is no involvement. One is simply wiping out the past and not creating new karmas. There is no involvement with prakriti to create new karmas. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:21):

*Niraasheer yatachittaatmaa tyaktasarvaparigraha.
Shaareeram kevalam karma kurvannaapnoti kilbisham.*

Without hope and with the mind and the self controlled,
having abandoned all greed, doing mere bodily action,
he incurs no sin.

When does karma end?

Swami Satyananda: There is no end to karma. Even in the stage of jivanmukti, liberation, there is karma. Even if one is liberated, one has karma. Even if one is a man of God one has karma. Christ, Mohammed, Sri Rama and Sri Krishna all had karma, I have karma and you have karma. No one can escape karma. As long as one has a body, one has karma. As long as one is a part of prakriti, one has karma, and one remains a part of prakriti even when one is liberated. Even when videhamukti, disembodiment, is attained, there is still karma for twenty-one days.

Existence is the last karma, not action. My guru, Swami Sivananda, just existed for twenty-one days. Somebody said, "Swamiji, food," and he ate from the spoon, "Swamiji, water," and he drank. Before he entered mahasamadhi, he had no physical consciousness as he was already in samadhi. He knew he was going to enter mahasamadhi and for twenty-one days he was unconscious. On the twenty-first day he opened his eyes and in the presence of a lady doctor from the medical college and several disciples, he asked, "Is this the twenty-first day?"

He then asked for pen and paper and wrote, "God is real, everything else is unreal." With that message Swamiji departed. Even though he had appeared unconscious for twenty-one days, he knew when it was the twenty-first day.

Therefore, there must be another higher consciousness which continues functioning at all times. He left his body after twenty-one days, when the last karma called existence, coordination of life, stopped.

A person cannot survive without karma. If a person's karmas come to an end today, tomorrow he will go. Therefore, one should never think of getting rid of karma, as long as one wants to enjoy this drama. The moment the karmas are finished, they leave the person automatically, so that even if he wants to do karma in the form of duties, the chances are practically nil that he makes karma. A sort of famine takes place, as far as desires are concerned; he is unable to have any desires. He wants to think and desire, but he cannot. He may start to do something, but half way through it he stops; he cannot go further. His capacity for desiring is finished.

How did Swami Satyananda attain mahasamadhi?

Swami Niranjanananda: Swami Satyananda was a person who had planned his whole life and he had planned his departure. He used to say, "I have never done anything in my life without any purpose or reason. Even my death has a purpose and a reason. I have come to Deoghar to leave my body. But I only have a one-way ticket, complete *mukti*, *nirvana* or liberation. I don't want that. I don't want the final one-way ticket. I want to come back. I don't want any kingdom, I don't want pleasure and comforts. I don't even want liberation from birth and death. I just want to return again and again to help those who are suffering. I am waiting until I have my return ticket. The day I have my return ticket, I'm going to leave this body."

He left like a yogi, seated in padmasana and in meditation. He simply inhaled and with a deep breath withdrew his pranas from the body. As he was leaving, it could be observed that he was not seeing anyone or hearing anything around him, but something totally different. As if at the last moment the entire knowledge was being revealed, he was chanting mantras that he was hearing, he was seeing

different entities around him. He was listening to something totally different, seeing something totally different.

In that manner he lived up to his sankalpa. He had said many times, “I don’t want to die in a hospital surrounded by the crying faces of my disciples and with tubes coming out of my nostrils and arms. I want to die with the name of Shiva on my lips, with the memory of guru in my heart and with the thought of Devi in my mind. A second before I depart from this body I will receive knowledge of all the *vidyas* or spiritual knowledge in the universe and that will be the fulfilment of this life.” And that is how he went.

It is definitely something that one can read about in books, but rarely is there the opportunity to witness such an experience.

How can a jivanmukta burn all his karmas and become a videhamukta?

Swami Satyananda: A man has been tilling the land for many years. The cost of this tilling has been much suffering, labour and pain. Finally, when the crop is standing ready to harvest, he wants to take a match to it. What madman would do this? Only a person who is realized, who thinks in a certain way can do it. A divine person can think, “What is the use of this harvest? I would have to reap it, eat it, sow it again, reap it again and eat it again.” Such a person can take petroleum to the field and burn it. If that is the conviction, the fundamental and unchangeable idea, then all karmas and even the destiny can be burnt at one glance. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:37):

*Yathaidhaamsi samiddho’gnirbhasmasaatkurute’rjuna;
Jnaanaagnih sarvakarmaani bhasmasaatkurute tathaa.*

As the blazing fire reduces fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, so does the fire of knowledge reduce all actions to ashes!

This ultimate vairagya is not possible for everybody to attain. The supreme fire by which one is able to burn the whole

harvest is not an ordinary attainment. It is easier to reap the harvest and suffer than to fight oneself at every moment to attain vairagya. A person may say the whole world is unreal, then the world says, "I am real. Don't you see me? I am very real." They have no answer to it. All the karmas can be burnt, not only the prarabdha, but the sanchita and the kriyamana karmas, the stock of actions and the present actions, but for that one must attain jnana. However, that jnana is not the knowledge derived from the Upanishads, Bible or Koran. Jnana is the perception of truth in all that is seen. The realization of a permanent being behind the impermanent things that are seen here and now is called *para vairagya*. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:46 and 13:27):

*Yaavaanartha udapaane sarvatah samplutodake;
Taavaansarveshu vedeshu braahmanasya vijaanatah.*

To the Brahmana who has known the Self, all the Vedas are of as much use as is a reservoir of water in a place where there is a flood. (2:46)

*Samam sarveshu bhooteshu tishthantam parameshvaram;
Vinashyatsvavinashyantam yah pashyati sa pashyati.*

He sees, who sees the Supreme Lord, existing equally in all beings, the unperishing within the perishing. (13:27)

Leaving one's family, wife and children is the lower form of vairagya. Monks and nuns leave the material world and take up a life of austerity and sacrifice, but that is lower vairagya, pertaining to the senses. Higher vairagya, which is called *para vairagya*, is transcendental. Everything in life appears a bit nonsensical when this form of detachment dawns. The person becomes a *videhamukta*, liberated from the body. He cannot come back. What has a person who thinks the world is unreal got to do with the world? In the *Bhagavad Gita* (5:17) it is said:

*Tadbuddhayastadaatmaanastannishthaastatparaayanaah;
Gachchhantyaapunaraavrittim jnaananiirdhootakalmashaah.*

Their intellect absorbed in That, their self being That; established in That, with That as their supreme goal, they go whence there is no return, their sins dispelled by knowledge.

How is the jivanmukta, who has completed his own cycle of evolution, born?

Swami Satyananda: Such a birth takes place in the normal way, as the result of a highly evolved man and woman coming together, or through immaculate conception, although this is very rare. The child conceived by a spiritual and noble couple of pure heart and mind will be a higher soul. This is also very rare, because the body, mind and heart of most people are weak. Generally, people don't even know what they can reproduce. They just want to create children and are not concerned with quality. However, for those who practise yoga and meditation and revolutionize their pattern of life, quality reproduction is possible, as the higher souls may select them for their conception. All beings are reincarnations, but those who have completed their own cycle of evolution accept rebirth in order to help mankind.

What is your attitude to this life?

Swami Satyananda: I am also performing karma. In fact, what I am doing is in preparation for the next life or birth. This life is as it is. By the grace of God, I have had a good guru, good friends, good opportunities and a favourable environment. I have also had the grace of Saraswatiji, Lakshmiji, Durgaji, Brahmaji, Vishnuji, Shankaraji and all the other gods and goddesses. They have given me a lot, and I have also been spending whatever I have received from them. But:

*Fold, fold your bedding quickly,
March on for the forward journey.
Do you consider this inn of the world
As your own dwelling place?*

God has told me, "Now, you have to accumulate your own earnings. Get up and fold your bedding. Stop your present journey. You have mistaken this worldly inn for your home. This is not your home; you have to leave it." After all, how long can one stay in a hotel? This world is a hotel; one has to leave it one day. The longer one stays in a hotel, the more fees one has to pay. It may be five hundred dollars or five hundred rupees. People have wrongly considered this worldly inn to be their home.

To live only for others should be the dharma of Swami Satyananda's life. I am just living to teach spiritual life. Once my seat is booked, I will leave this body and go back to my original home from where I came.

Humans live in a foreign land and this world of mankind is a foreign land. One is a visitor here for fifty or eighty years, this is not one's home. Kabir said:

*This world is not a permanent place to stay.
It is a traveller's lodge in a foreign land.
This world is like a folded piece of paper,
Which dissolves even with a drop of water.
This world is a garden of thorns,
In which one dies after being entangled.
This world is a thick, impassable jungle,
Which must be burned by fire to clear the way.
Kabir says, O men of wisdom, remember
That the safest abode is the name of the Lord.*

One has only come here as a visitor. One is a resident of a different world and that is where one has to return. This is not just believed, it is known. The seed of man does not belong to this earth; the seed of man belongs to a greater plane. From there, due to his karma, or his error, or for some other purpose, or due to God's will, he has somehow descended to this earthly plane where birth and death is the regular law of life.

Life is an experiment, and Nature is performing it. She moulds, fashions, refashions, breaks and joins the jiva

through various methods in various lives. Life, this world, is a school where one studies and learns so many lessons, provided one is keen and alert. There is nothing permanent here where one can rest. Here one has to search for immortality, whereas immortality is one's inherent nature. One's soul is eternal, and one should rest there.

This world is not the real home of the *jivatma*, the individual soul. This world does not belong to anyone; it is an alien land and is not one's permanent abode. In this temporary world one has to work hard. Hard work purifies the soul, and the inner light begins to unfold itself. After completing one's visit in this foreign land, one has to return to one's original home. That home is the abode of God.



6

Human Effort and Divine Grace

PURUSHARTHA

Can a person change his destiny?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is a true story about a man who lived in California. He was afraid that California would go underwater due to an earthquake caused by the San Andreas Fault. He used to have nightmares of his house collapsing, his family and himself being buried under the rubble of the house, the whole state sinking underwater. He was terrified of living and working in California. Eventually somebody said to him, “Instead of living in constant fear, why don’t you leave the state and go and settle in some other part of America?” He left California and settled in the state of Montana. There was an earthquake there, his house collapsed and he died. So, how far can one avoid destiny? One cannot.

An event occurred in Bariarpur, only fourteen kilometres from Munger. Two men were travelling on a motorcycle. They came to a railway crossing and stopped. A vulture flew overhead, carrying a snake. The snake fell from the vulture’s claws on top of one of the men, bit him and started slithering away. The vulture swooped down again, picked up the snake and flew off. The man died. What would one call that? Death from heaven? How could anybody have imagined that that

snake was going to fall from the sky, and the man was going to die of snake bite? Destiny as such cannot be changed.

In order to understand destiny, the role of karma has to be understood. The destiny of the body is to grow old, decay and die. Can the process of growing old be stopped? The trigger was pulled the moment one took birth, the bullet is on its way and it will hit the bulls-eye the moment one dies. That destiny has already started and no one has the ability to stop it. However, there are other forms of destiny, or karma which one can change and create. For example, I can become anything I want: a teacher, a householder, a sweeper on the road, a cobbler or a business tycoon. I make my own destiny in that way. If I have the awareness that from there I can become something else, I will make my own destiny again. This kind of destiny is purushartha karma, what I make; prarabdha karma is what God makes. One has to have that kind of understanding before deciding whether destiny can be changed or not.

Can destiny be influenced by effort?

Swami Sivananda: Prarabdha karma is only the purushartha of previous births. The self-effort of today becomes the destiny of tomorrow, so self-effort and destiny are one and the same.

God and purushartha are synonymous terms; they are two names for the same thing. What is destiny after all? It is one's own make-up. One has created certain things and can also destroy or undo them. One is thinking in a particular way now: "I am Mr So and So, I am a Brahmin, I am a doctor, I am stout and I am a householder." This is *prarabdha karma*, the karma which is bound to fructify in the present life. This particular mode of thinking can be changed by thinking: "I am Brahman, I am omnipotent, I am the witness or *sakshi*, I am God, I am neither the body nor the mind, I am Truth, I am the all-pervading pure consciousness." This is purushartha.

Everyone is the architect of their own fate, the master of their own destiny. One can do and undo things. One sows an

action and reaps a tendency. One sows a tendency and reaps a habit. One sows a habit and reaps a character. One sows a character and reaps a destiny. Therefore, destiny is one's own creation; it is a bundle of habits. One can undo it if one likes. Purushartha is self-exertion; it can give one anything. It is said in *Yoga Vasishtha* (6(2):157:28):

*Na kinchana mahaabuddhe tadasteeha jagattraye;
Yadanudveginaa naama paurushena na labhyate.*

There is nothing in all these three worlds which is hard to be acquired by means of earnest endeavour and intense application.

Lakshman also says to Sri Rama in the *Ramayana* (Kishkindha-kanda, 1:121):

*Utsaho balavaanaarya naastyutsaahat param balam
Sotsaahasya hi lokeshu na kinchidapi durlabham.*

Strenuous effort alone is powerful, O worthy sir! There is no might greater than exertion. Indeed nothing whatsoever is difficult to attain in all the worlds for a man given to endeavour.

Character is the determining factor in victory and defeat, success and failure and in all the issues of life. A person of good character enjoys life herein and hereafter. Thoughts are the bricks with which character is built. Character is not born; it is formed. Determination to build a definite character in life is needed, and it must be followed up with persistent striving. The human being is not a creature of circumstances; one's thoughts are the architects of one's circumstances.

A person of character builds a life out of circumstances, steadily persevering and plodding. He does not look back, but marches forward bravely. He is not afraid of obstacles, never frets and fumes, never gets discouraged and disappointed. He is full of vigour, energy, vim and

vitality, ever zealous and enthusiastic. Character is power, it is influence and it makes friends. It draws patronage and support, creates friends and funds, and opens a sure and easy way to wealth, honour, success and happiness. A person shapes his life by building his character.

Destiny can be conquered by changing one's habits and mode of thinking. Now one thinks: "I am the body." Start the spiritual anti-current and think: "I am the immortal, diseaseless, sexless atman." In this way one can conquer death and attain the immortal seat of supreme splendour. Destiny can be disarmed by virtuous deeds and right thoughts. Everyone has free will to act. By self-exertion Ratnakar became Valmiki, by self-exertion Markandeya conquered death, by self-exertion Uddalaka attained nirvikalpa samadhi, and by self-exertion Savitri brought her husband, Satyavan, back to life.

Everyone should, therefore, apply themselves tenaciously to enquiry and meditation. Be vigilant and diligent. Overcome tomorrow's evil by today's self-exertion. Destroy unholy desires, *ashubha vasanas*, through holy desires, *shubha vasanas*. Slay unholy thoughts by holy thoughts and gain victory over destiny. Do not yield to fatalism. Do not become impotent. Stand like a lion. Exert and attain independence, *atma swarajya*. There is a magazine of power and a vast ocean of knowledge within. All faculties are latent within. Unfold them and become a jivanmukta, a liberated soul.

Positive overcomes negative; this is the immutable law of nature. Purushartha or self-exertion is a mighty power; it is the lion or the elephant. Prarabdha or destiny is the cat or the jackal. God helps those who help themselves.

What is the relation between destiny, free will and personal effort?

Swami Satyananda: When the karmas are in a state of maturity, they are called destiny, but when the karmas are not in a state of maturity, they are not destiny. Therefore, a certain conclusion has been drawn, according to yoga and

Samkhya philosophy. There are certain forms of karma which one has to accept and there are other forms of karma which one can improve upon. There is a place for free will, and there is a truth about destiny that one has to accept. In Samkhya, yoga and some other philosophies, there are many discussions about prarabdha or destiny and purushartha, free will. These two universal laws should be understood properly. The fructification of karma is known as destiny. Birth as well as death is an outcome and a part of that plan called destiny.

The law of karma is an eternal law and it is the truth. People do not see it because they have no time. But if one analyzes oneself, it must be accepted that one is a product of something. One is not just born – the body is the result of a union between two forces. Nobody is immaculate, and therefore each person is a product. Even as the body is a product, the mind must also be a product. It can't be said that the body is the product of two forces and the mind is independent. The way one thinks, feels and imagines, the way one acts in the family and the way one moves is the product of some cause. Therefore, each person's life on this planet is one link in a great chain. This is the truth, but at the same time, nature has given man a little spark of independent will. In yoga, this spark is called purushartha, the power of the spirit. Everyone is born with this power, but it is in seed form and usually one is not able to use it.

Destiny and purushartha are two different things. This is what I have seen in my life. I did not desire whatever I got; I could not even have believed that all this would happen. I spent twelve years in my guru's ashram in Rishikesh and worked hard there. After that, I became a *bhikshu*, a beggar. I would spread a blanket and put a bowl in front of me at fairs. I would buy my meals with whatever money people gave and sleep in a dharmashala. I wandered like that for many years. I could never have imagined that I would spread yoga to every corner of the world! Yoga is not my subject either; I never studied it. I studied Vedanta and Sanskrit. I have often

asked myself, “How did all this happen?” I did not think or act; I did not have the capability or even the courage. When I studied the lives of many people and thought about it, I came to the conclusion that one will receive whatever one has to receive from destiny, and the work that one does is the need of *ahamkara*, ego.

Can actions and efforts influence destiny?

Swami Niranjanananda: People can create their own destiny. Swami Vivekananda said, “The coward and the fool say, ‘This is fate’, but the strong man stands up and says, ‘I will make my fate’.” Lakshman says to Sri Rama in the *Ramayana* (Ayodhyakanda, 23:16–17):

*Viklavo veeryaheeno yah sa daivamnuvartatei
Veerah sambhaavitaatmaano na daivam paryupaasate.*

*Drashyanti tvadya daivasya paurusham purushasya cha
Daivamaanushayoradya vyakta vyaktirbhavishyati.*

He who is cowardly and powerless trusts in fate. The valiant, who are possessed of a strong mind, never seek shelter in fate. (16)

A man who is capable of setting aside the decree of fate through personal effort never feels disheartened on his purpose being thwarted by destiny. (17)

Destiny has two forms: one that is controlled by the human being and another that is controlled by a superior force. A person cannot control birth or death, but the destiny of everyday circumstances can be controlled. Destiny is like a stake in the ground. A goat tied by a ten metre rope to a post in the ground can only move freely ten metres away from the central post to which it is tied, so it goes around and around the post and sometimes ties itself up more and more. Here one sees the two aspects of destiny.

The post represents the cosmic force of life that some call God and others call *Ishwara*, the undecaying, unchanging,

transcendental principle. The rope represents the changing principle. In the world of matter the changing, decaying principle is encountered, and beyond the world of matter the unchanging principle is encountered. There are two aspects of existence, the decaying and the non-decaying. Destiny is the bridge between the changing and the unchanging principle. Destiny is the law that governs every aspect of creation. The growth of the body from birth till death, the maturity of the mind and the expression of human nature is destiny.

There is a statement in the Upanishads that a person can change his destiny through karma. This means that it is possible to change the quality of nature through the proper performance and harmonious expression of action in life. Once the quality of nature changes, the expression of that nature is different. Was it the destiny of a river to be converted into a dam, where hydro-electric power is generated? No, the nature or destiny of the river is to flow from the highest to the lowest point. What happens to the river in between is undecided. In between there may be some barriers, some dams, some man-made lakes, but the river continues on its course from the highest to the lowest point. When a person tries to channel the forces of life through action or karma, destiny is definitely transformed, and this leads to the attainment of perfection in life.

If a person tries to change his destiny, is it still bound to come to him again in some form or other?

Swami Satyananda: Not necessarily. If a person changes his destiny by improving himself, it will never come to him again. But if one wants to change one's destiny by some psychic method, it will come back again in some form.

If everyone is subject to destiny, why should any effort be made?

Swami Sivananda: The person who advocates the theory of purushartha says, "I am not a straw to be tossed about hither and thither. I can change my prarabdha. I have a free

will of my own; I will make it pure, strong and irresistible. I will work out my salvation and become free.” Another philosopher says, “Everything is prearranged in the Grand Scheme. God knows the details of a man’s evolution from mineral to liberated soul. In reality all is prarabdha, but purushartha is preached to give an impetus for the person to work in right earnest. Otherwise he will become slothful and dull.” If a person succeeds in an attempt, he calls it purushartha. He says, “I really exerted myself and I have succeeded.” If he fails, the same person says, “What can I do? Without God nothing can be done: no atom can move, no leaf can wave in the air.”

Destiny is one’s own creation. Life is governed by the law of karma; the law operates and one reaps the fruits of one’s actions. The theory of prarabdha does not make anyone a fatalist. No one can remain inactive even for a second because there is an urge from within to work. The *Bhagavad Gita* (3:5) says:

*Na hi kashchitkshanamapi jaatu tishthatyakarmakrit;
Kaayate hyavashah karma sarvah prakritijairgunaih.*

Nor can anyone, even for an instant, remain actionless, for everyone is helplessly driven to action by the qualities, or gunas, born of nature.

For a bhakta, all is prarabdha because he is a person of self-surrender and has to glorify the power of the Lord. For a Vedantin, all is purushartha because he is a person of self-reliance, who has to glorify the power of his own strong will, *atma bala*. Both are correct from their own standpoint.

Each soul must fulfil the law of karma to gain divine wisdom. Each soul must sit alone at the gate. The guru can lead him up to the gate, but no one can push him through. Everyone must fight their own battle for self-purification, concentration and control of the mind. In *Manusmriti* (7:205) it is said:

*Sarva karmedamaayattam vidhaane daivamaanushe;
Tayordaivamachintyam tu maanushe vidyate kriyaa.*

Success in every undertaking depends on destiny and man combined. The acts of destiny are out of the control of man. Think not of destiny, but act yourself.

Purushartha can do and undo things. If one is ailing, one must do purushartha, instead of taking medicine and leaving the results to prarabdha. Prarabdha is the result of one's own thoughts and actions. One should change the mode of thinking. Fatalism produces inertia, so one should exert oneself. Man is the master of his destiny. An aspirant should think, "I am the immortal self," and he will become the immortal self. As a person thinks, so he becomes; this is the immutable law. One's destiny is mapped out by one's thoughts. A person has only as much power as he imagines he has. The limit of a person's thought is the limit of his possibilities. The world around one is as one has willed it to be, because the circumstances and environments are the materialization of one's thoughts. The experiences a person has in the world rise or fall in accordance with his thoughts. Whatever thought is cherished in the world will ultimately be realized.

Human effort and divine grace are interconnected. It is true that everything is predestined and preplanned by the Lord, and everything takes place in accordance with the holy writ. But God has also given the individual free will to do right or wrong, to discriminate between *preyo marga*, the path of sensorial enjoyment, and *shreyo marga*, the path of righteousness. A person endowed with true wisdom as to the fleeting and painful nature of worldly enjoyments can exert himself in the right direction to do or undo his prarabdha, the portion of karmas that has ripened for actual experience in this current birth.

Why do people need to make any effort?

Swami Satyananda: Everyone has to do purushartha, whether or not fate exists. The train will arrive at the station at its

prescribed time, not earlier. If a person reaches the station two hours early, he will have to go for a stroll. In the same way, one will get whatever destiny has decided. A person receives happiness or sorrow according to the amount written against his name. He definitely gets the specified amount of both, so there is no need to worry. Still a person has to exert, because he cannot exist without action. If a person gets money, a house and everything else that he wanted, what will he do? He will work because life demands work, because work is an inseparable part of life.

If a person sits all day doing nothing, he will get depressed and die. That is the reason why God has given mankind karmas, worries, hassles, and also courage and patience. This maintains sanity in the human mind. A person exerts because he suffers from an inherent weakness. That is why God has created *kama*, *vasana*, *trishna*, *bhaya* and *chinta*, passion, deep-rooted desire, temptation, fear and worry.

God can remove all of these in one minute. There are many sadhus and saints who can do this. However, for the ordinary person that would create problems: no sexual drive, no anger, no pride, no greed and no attachment! Such a state should be accessible only to those whose desires have been exhausted. If one can remain without action, there is no problem.

If a person does not work, this mischievous mind will drive him crazy! He will go mad! That is why I ask everybody to do karma yoga. I work and I ask everyone to work, but not because the work will give good results.

I worked for as long as I could, but for the last few years I have lived without work. I sit the whole day through and it is not a problem. I am comfortable; no thoughts or worries come. I do not feel any sense of responsibility; I do not feel any desires. I just keep on sitting. When a person comes to this state, he can give up work.

The saints say that struggle is an essential part of sadhana. The aspirant who struggles until completely

exhausted, then lies still in surrender, finds himself saved. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (6:45):

*Prayatnaadyatamaanastu yogee samshuddhakilbishah;
Anekajanmasamsiddhastato yaati paraam gatim.*

But the yogi who strives with assiduity, purified of sins and perfected, gradually reaches the highest goal through many births.

What is the role of effort, if the circumstances of life determine what a person becomes?

Swami Sivananda: A person is not the product of environmental forces. Many of the world's greatest people have been born in poverty and adverse circumstances. Many born in slums and filthy surroundings have risen to the highest status in the world. They have won laurels of fame and distinguished themselves in politics, literature and poetry. They have become brilliant geniuses and beacons of the world. Sri Shankaracharya, the exponent of Advaita philosophy, a spiritual giant and a brilliant genius, was born in poor and unfavourable circumstances. There are thousands of instances like this. Therefore, a poor environment cannot annihilate the potential greatness and excellence of a future genius.

A person can grow beyond his environment through right exertion, diligent application, integrity, sincerity of purpose, iron will and strong determination. Poverty has its own virtues. Poverty infuses humility, strength, the power of endurance and the spirit of struggle and perseverance. Luxury begets laziness, pride, weakness, inertia and all sorts of evil habits. Therefore, a person should not grumble about bad environments. He should remember that in his weakness lies his strength, as he will always be on the alert to safeguard himself.

A person can create his own mental world and environments. The person who tries to evolve and grow in an

adverse environment will be strong indeed and nothing will shake him. He will be of sterner stuff and have strong nerves. The human being is certainly not a creature of environments or circumstances. He can control and modify them with his capacities, thoughts, good actions and right exertions, or purushartha. Parents prescribe purushartha to their children.

Exert, conquer nature and rejoice in the eternal satchidananda atman. Do purushartha now, remove raga and dwesha and rest in peace; then nature becomes the obedient servant. One is the master or lord of nature. Do sadhana. Practise! Practise! Realize! Realize! This is the highest duty; one has taken this body to achieve this end!

In the course of life should one make effort or just let things happen?

Swami Satyananda: One has to let things happen, but at the same time make some effort. One should not lose hope and courage, but try to act in the best possible manner that will contribute to success. It is always good to fight with the circumstances and events of life, but one must know that in order to fight well in life, it is best to maintain a balanced attitude rather than to become excited, neurotic or unnecessarily stimulated. In order to make a house, factory, shop or family, one has to make positive efforts, but sometimes things don't work out. This affects the mind negatively and one is beset with psychological, mental and physical problems. At this time, letting things happen is a good philosophy, although it should only be practised when things have gone beyond one's control.

As long as the situation is under control, one should try to work it out as smoothly and intelligently as possible. When the husband and wife live together, they should try to be as happy as possible, and if there are occasional troubles between them, they should try to resolve them. If a complete split is going to take place, they should still try to avoid it. Even if they do separate, they should think about making

amends and renewing the relationship. However, if the relationship is completely finished, they must simply accept it. This is the best way to avoid psychological, mental and physical problems, and it applies to all situations in life.

How does nature exemplify purushartha?

Swami Sivananda: The husk is natural to rice and rust to copper; yet they can be made to disappear through efforts. Even so, *ajnana*, or ignorance, which clings to the soul, can be made to disappear through ceaseless effort. The mango tree does purushartha; it gives shade to the weary traveller and delicious fruit to the proprietor. The jasmine emanates sweet fragrance to all. The ants are busy collecting grains in summer that they will enjoy in their holes during the rainy season and winter. The bees collect honey vigorously from the flowers. The rivers supply good sparkling water to people. The sun gives energy and warmth to plants and human beings, and converts the salty water of the sea into good drinkable water. The sandal tree sends out fragrance in all directions. The musk deer gives musk. The earth supplies grains, gold, iron, lead, vegetables and other necessities. An aspirant should learn practical lessons from nature. He should make efforts to destroy avidya and rest in his own self.

Can destiny be transcended by the awakening of the chakras?

Swami Satyananda: The tantric scriptures describe anahata chakra as the wish-fulfiller. There are two ways of thinking in human life: one is the independent way and the other the dependent way. One approach to life is that whatever a person thinks will eventuate; the second approach is that a person will achieve whatever is destined for him. The latter approach holds true up to manipura chakra: a person will have and enjoy whatever has been ordained for him. But once the kundalini shakti comes to anahata, the approach changes: whatever a person wishes shall come to him.

Most of the *jivas*, individual souls, who are treading their paths towards the higher stages of consciousness,

remain completely dependent on the destiny that is already enjoined for them. In mooladhara chakra, a person is completely dependent on destiny. Even the awakening of kundalini does not make much difference there, or in swadhisthana or manipura either. When the consciousness ascends to manipura, a person may become a master of some situations in life, but is still bound to the karmas done in previous incarnations. One is not completely free of the karmas there.

The lower chakras, mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura, belong to the empirical dimension, which relates to the body, mind and senses. But anahata chakra is almost beyond the empirical; it is a non-earthly dimension. Mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura are worldly, but manipura is at the boundary. People who are stuck at mooladhara and swadhisthana believe in fate. Those who belong to manipura may believe in fate, but they know they can escape it, even though they do not always know how.

When an object is thrown into the sky, how far up it goes depends upon its speed and gravity. Sufficient speed would be necessary to project that object out of the gravitational field. That is how rockets are launched into space – sufficient speed has to be gained. In the same way, the mind, consciousness and individual approach to life gain speed in anahata. In mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura a person may be a yoga practitioner, but not a yogi. Once the consciousness has gone into the dimension of anahata, one becomes a yogi, not before.

According to the tantric and yogic texts there are three categories of aspirant: one who wishes to tread the path of yoga, one who practises yoga, and a yogi who has practised yoga and is established in yogic consciousness. The practitioner becomes a yogi from anahata, because there he depends solely upon the power of his own consciousness, rather than on anything external or determined by fate. At anahata, figuratively speaking, the consciousness is accelerated to the speed of feeling and willing.

Just below anahata chakra is the symbol of a tree, which is known as *kalpa vriksha*, the wish-fulfilling tree. Everyone wishes to be prosperous, peaceful and have a good life, and everyone has that tree within; however, it does not fructify in most people due to the power of reasoning. In anahata this tree becomes manifest and whatever a person wishes will come true. But one should be careful what one wishes for. There is a story about this tree at anahata chakra to bear in mind.

Once a traveller stopped to rest beneath a tree. He was feeling tired and thirsty, and wanted to have a drink. He thought of a small brook nearby, and immediately there was water. After drinking some water, he felt hungry and thought that he would like to eat something; immediately food appeared. After eating the food, he felt sleepy. As soon as he thought about lying down, a nice bed appeared and he slept. The foolish man did not know why all this was happening. He did not know that he had stopped beneath the wish-fulfilling tree. In the evening when he awoke, the sun had already set and night had fallen. He got up and thought, "Oh, it is terribly dark. Maybe the tigers will come and eat me," and so it happened. This is called wish-fulfilment. In anahata this capacity for wish-fulfilment awakens, and whatever one wishes comes true.

How can willpower, sankalpa or prayer influence destiny?

Swami Satyananda: If a person has a strong sankalpa, he can overcome karma for some time, but not indefinitely. However, the person who makes the sankalpa will have to make certain concessions or promises, for when karma is overcome, it must be replaced with something else. Something must be substituted to fill that gap, and it is possible to do this. Many people make a vow or a promise to God in order to change their destiny, to overcome some karma. They not only ask for something, but also promise to give something in return. When I made a sankalpa before God, I asked for something, but I also promised to give something. This is necessary as ultimately karma cannot be

replaced; it has to be undergone. However, sankalpas have power and they can be created to divert karma.

Prayer is a powerful means for the fulfilment of a wish, if it is done properly. However, when making a wish, a person must also pledge to renounce something. The kriyamana karma, actions not yet performed, can be altered. The sanchita karma, stored actions, can also be altered, but one cannot alter the prarabdha karma, destined actions, by any ritual or anushthana. For this, one has to make an adjustment, and prayer is one such type of adjustment. Prayer for the fulfilment of a wish is not a simple matter. Prayer requires a deep relationship with God. Nothing is impossible to attain in the kingdom of God, but God is a complicated element. He cannot be handled easily. There is only one way to handle God: make a prayer and make a promise which even He does not know of.

What is true free will or willpower, and how does it differ from making a choice?

Swami Satyananda: Making a choice is also karma. There are two forces in the universe: one is karma, action and reaction, and the other is free will. Free will is not karma. One wills and it happens because will is independent of karma, but the emergence of willpower takes time in spiritual life. As a human being evolves and becomes master of his own mind, he develops the ability to exert his will. When the mind becomes powerful, it is sometimes able to give shape to the events of life, but that is also a part of the chain of karma. If one thinks strongly, “I am going to do that,” and it happens, this is not an outcome of will, but of a strong mental choice one has made. There is a big difference between willpower and mental choice. Willpower is a mighty force and when it has developed fully, one can transcend the gravity of karma; then evolution is complete and one becomes a co-creator, a junior god.

Willpower does not operate in most people. In order to use the power of will, a person must have a strong mind.

Generally, people live according to circumstances. Nature kicks them around like a football from one end of the field to the other. One should learn to control the impulses of the mind and stop mental dissipation. Next one should discipline the body and mind and learn to focus the energies of the mind. If a person can stop the thoughts and focus the mind for some time, willpower will come into operation.

Through willpower one can influence the child in the womb. Through willpower one can change the situation in the family. Through willpower one can change one's nature overnight. Through willpower one can change any attitude or habit that is considered to be bad. A person who does that can have freedom of choice. A person can have freedom of choice only when he transcends the instincts that control life. Life is in one's hands. When a person becomes the master, life is like a puppet.

In order to develop willpower, one should first change the little things in life, then the big things in life and finally the course of one's life. Life is not just seventy or eighty years; they are just one act in life. Many acts have been gone through and there will be many more acts which one has to go through.

How does a person know that he is changing his destiny?

Swami Satyananda: When a person becomes spiritual, when he believes in a higher mental condition and has actually experienced it, he will know that he is changing his destiny. By the practice of yoga, one can change one's entire destiny. One does not have to will it; it happens automatically. Even for a spiritual person there is destiny, but to a great extent, many things are written off.

Can destiny be transformed by purushartha?

Swami Niranjanananda: Destiny cannot be transformed by purushartha or effort. Destiny can only be transformed by grace. Purushartha and effort can make a person more alert, cautious and aware of how he lives his life. They can

ensure that one doesn't become entangled in the negative dimensions and expressions of life. They can ensure that one remains positive and optimistic till the end of the journey.

When a person buys a house, it is totally bare. As the new owner he is free to decorate it inside according to choice. As the house is decorated to please himself and others, it becomes an example of beauty. This is *purushartha*. But the destiny was being given a ceiling, four walls and a floor on first entering the house.

What is the importance of choice in the manifestation of destiny?

Swami Niranjanananda: Free will is dependent on choices. The road itself is already set out and one has to walk along it. But how one walks, whether zigzag or straight, is one's choice. In order to attain harmony, certain changes in one's lifestyle are necessary. *Purushartha*, or effort, has to be made in order to make these changes. *Purushartha* is yoga.

DIVINE GRACE

Is there something beyond destiny and personal effort that determines one's life?

Swami Satyananda: I will tell you my personal philosophy first. I have worked hard throughout my life, as a student, as a sannyasin in the ashram, as a *parivrajaka*, and now as the founder of many movements. But I have come to the conclusion that it is not my efforts that have borne fruit. This is not my belief, I know it! Although the hard work has borne fruits, at the same time, I do not believe it was my destiny that things have happened as they did. I have come to the conclusion that I have become the medium of *anugraha*, divine grace.

Whatever has happened in my life has not been due to my effort, or *purushartha*. Even if I had made no effort, it would have happened. Yet I made the effort because that in itself was a part of the will of God. This is the

important point: God wanted me to achieve and therefore it was impossible not to make the effort. God gave me the inspiration to make the effort – he gave me such a mind that I could make the effort. Are one's achievements the outcome of destiny or purushartha, self-effort? The seers say they are the outcome of God's grace. In short, when God's grace is received, no one has to do any purushartha.

When the car breaks down, it is towed away by another vehicle that is stronger than the car. Similarly, prayer and faith in God have the power to transform one's life, to overcome frustrations and failures, to turn defeats into victories, and to make the weak body strong. Therefore, what is of fundamental importance is how to bring about a transformation in one's life, mentality, desires, anxiety, craftiness, irate and intolerant nature. How can one create a loving and beautiful atmosphere at home? The only remedy is to have faith in God and pray to Him with intense sincerity. Rabindranath Tagore has said this beautifully:

*I am not to be liberated by renunciation alone.
I experience the pleasure of liberation,
Even in thousands of bondages of love.
From Thy flame I will continue to light
Innumerable lights in my life and arrange them
On the sacrificial altar of Your temple.*

*No, I will never arrest my sense organs
Within the fetters of self-control.
In my senses of sight, hearing and touch,
There will be the feeling of Your bliss.
All the darkness of my misgivings will be illumined
By offering my being as the fuel of the ananda-yajna.
And all my desires will ripen into fruits of love.*

Even if the law of karma is inexorable, there is scope for divine grace. Grace comes through penitence, austerity and devotion. Self-effort or purushartha and destiny or prarabdha are one. They are two names indicating only one

thing. Just as the present becomes the past and the future becomes the present, just as there is only the present, so also there is only purushartha. When God works through man, it is purushartha. Grace becomes purushartha.

Rainfall is not under human control, yet when a farmer ploughs his field, he exercises purushartha or self-effort. The crop may fail due to lack of rain, but still man does not lose heart. He performs sacrifices to get rain and reaps a good harvest.

Destiny is one's own creation. Everyone has created their own destiny through thoughts and actions. It can be undone by opposite thinking and opposite action.

Do purification and transformation depend on personal effort?

Swami Satyananda: The samskaras from many different births will vanish or subside only by the Lord's grace. However long a person works at removing his rubbish, he will not be able to do it. Nothing is possible without divine grace. If a person thinks he can remove his own rubbish by himself, that is speaking the language of ego. How can he remove it? First of all, he does not even know what his rubbish is and what it is not. Sometimes he may be throwing away the diamonds and keeping the stones, as he does not know the difference between them. Most people do not have the discrimination to know what is true and what is false.

Swami Sivananda was a man who believed in everybody and never thought that anyone was bad. He was a man without ego and ambition, who never posed as a great swami. Thousands of people came to him and were helped out of difficult situations, but his only comment was, "It is all God's grace." They would say to him, "Swamiji, you are a great siddha, a great master. On account of your blessings my child has come through this crisis." He would reply, "No, no, no. It is God's grace and your prarabdha karma."

Many people think, "If I do good karma, I will negate the bad karma. If I go to satsang or perform two or three

charitable works, I will negate my bad karma.” It is true that when a person does good karma, the bad karma is balanced. But is a person really free to do good karma? No, there is someone within him who is responsible, who guides him to do or not to do. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:61):

*Eeshvarah sarvabhootaanaam hriddeshe’rjuna tishthati;
Bhraamayansarvabhootaani yantraaroodhaani maayayaa.*

The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, causing them to revolve by His illusive power, as if mounted on a machine!

Hrishikesha means the Lord of the *indriyas*, the senses, the inner Lord in one’s heart. Sages and saints have been saying:

*Twayaa Hrisheekeshena hridisthitena yathaa niyuktosmi
tathaa karomi.*

I follow the dictates of *Hrishikesha*, the Lord seated within my own heart.

The indweller of the heart in each and everyone is an effulgent, conscious, intelligent, ever aware self, which one calls ‘I’. It is not the egoistic ‘I’, but the cosmic ‘I’, the light. It is through Him that the karmas can be balanced or negated. If a person thinks he is free, he is wrong. If a person thinks he can do good acts, he is mistaken. All people are like puppets.

Shiva tells Parvati that Gosainji, a name for the Lord, makes everyone dance like wooden dolls, *daaru* or puppets. *Go* means *indriyas* or senses, and *sai* means swami. *Gosain* is the master of the *indriyas* or senses. Govinda or Gosain mean the same thing. The master of the senses is Govinda, who is making everybody dance, just as a puppeteer makes the puppets dance. He is the director, scriptwriter, project officer and designer – this is the ultimate truth.

In human life a person who has dharma, divine law, can progress faster and faster. Otherwise, to be honest, a person

does nothing. All are in the hands of a greater divine power. Not only human beings but the entire cosmos is in the hands of a higher power and He leads everything on and on. Swami Vivekananda has said, "What one calls nature or fate is simply God's will." In this sense, there is no place for free will or my will. I used to think that man could regulate the course of life, that he could change his destiny. But today, when I think about life, I feel that destiny is truth and man must accept it. Kabir has rightly said:

*Your destiny is already written by the Lord,
No rewriting or remodelling is now possible.
It cannot be increased or lessened by a single particle,
Though crores of remedies are tried, none will avail.
The qualities one has been born with will surely remain.
Even if one endeavours with all his might,
Fate will not be increased or diminished by one iota.*

Does everything depend on the grace of God or guru?

Swami Sivananda: No, there must be purushartha also. The grace comes only when purushartha is done. A professor will not answer the exam questions for the student and make him pass. Grace helps one to raise oneself. Everybody should work out their own salvation. One may ask, "What then is grace?" If an aspirant gets letters from his preceptor, clearing his doubts, that is grace. If an aspirant comes to the ashram, takes a bath in the Ganges and hears the lectures there, that is grace.

Many people thirst to come and bathe in the Ganges, even *crorepathis*, who possess millions of rupees, but they do not all get a chance to come and have their wish fulfilled. If good books are available for *swadhyaya*, self-study, it is grace. If one enjoys good health for doing sadhana, that is grace. If God so wishes, He can give mukti to the whole world in an instant; but He does not do so. Realization cannot come as a miracle given by the guru. Gautama Buddha, Jesus Christ, Rama Tirtha have all done sadhana. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Sri

Krishna did not say to Arjuna, “I will give you mukti now.” Instead, He asked Arjuna to develop vairagya and abhyasa (6:35):

*Asamshayam mahaabaaho mano durnigraham chalam.
Abhyaasena tu kaunteya vairaagyena cha grihyate.*

Undoubtedly, O mighty-armed Arjuna, the mind is difficult to control and restless; but it may be restrained by practice and dispassion.

Abandon the wrong notion that the guru will give samadhi and mukti. Strive, purify, meditate and realize. Of course, *guru kripa*, the grace of guru, is necessary, but that does not mean that the disciple should sit idle. He must do purushartha, spiritual practices; the whole work must be done by the student. Nowadays, people are not prepared to undergo any sadhana for purification and self-realization. They want a magic pill to push them into samadhi. If any disciple has such a delusion, he should give it up immediately.

The guru and the shastras can show the path and remove doubts, but the direct intuitive experience must be achieved by one's own efforts. A hungry person will have to eat for himself; one who has severe itching will have to scratch for himself. No doubt, the guru's blessings can do everything, but one only receives his blessings by pleasing him. A guru can be pleased with his disciple only if the latter carries out his spiritual instructions implicitly. Therefore, disciples should carefully follow the instructions of the guru and act on those instructions. Only then will they deserve his blessings, and then his blessings can do everything.

How is karma removed through surrender to guru?

Swami Satyananda: Surrender to guru is a powerful and difficult way of becoming a disciple. It is not a religious, social or biological relationship; it is a spiritual relationship, in which a person offers himself. When one offers oneself, all the karmas go to the guru. Christians say that Christ died

for man's sins, which means exactly the same thing. Why did Ramakrishna Paramahansa have cancer? Why have many saints suffered, although they had a high quality of life? Their lives were so ideal, but still they suffered at the end because they were gurus and they accepted the karma of their disciples.

The relationship between guru and disciple is an important act of superseding karma. One does not become a disciple just by loving the guru, worshipping the guru, or propagating the guru's teaching. It is an experience of inner union; the disciple has no individual existence before the guru. In himself he may be an emperor, a king or a ruler, a powerful commander, but when he is aware of his guru, he does not exist. A householder can look after his family, children and everybody. He can do all the duties expected of him, but before his guru he does not exist. It is not an intellectual relationship.

What is the connection between self-effort and grace in spiritual life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Self-effort is the first step in the experience of grace. Grace is a state of fulfilment in which one is in tune with the will of the divine, and that divine will guides the life of the aspirant. In order to come to the level where grace manifests, one has to attune one's nature to divine grace, and this requires self-effort. Sadhana is this aspect of self-effort. The three aspects of effort are practice, awareness and application. By these three efforts a state of inner harmony can be reached, and one begins to realize that divine grace controls the whole of life and destiny.

Initially an aspirant may lack the ability to flow with life as he struggles in the quest for contentment, satisfaction, fulfilment and enjoyment. The aim of every spiritual tradition in the world is to teach one how to flow with life and end the struggle. People have become self-centred and self-oriented; they identify with their ambitions and aspirations, likes and dislikes. As long as this self-oriented identification

is there, how can one accept the validity of divine grace? It is only an intellectual or conceptual process at this level; one can think about it, but cannot know it or experience it. Grace has to be experienced, there is no use in thinking about it. In order to experience grace, effort must be made. Effort is the first stage in the process of experiencing grace.

How can the need for effort be reconciled with the need to surrender to grace?

Swami Sivananda: One should do one's best, with initiative, enterprise and perseverance, but depend on God's grace for everything. Prayer invokes the inner potentialities of the individual, which flow only from God, and they can certainly work miracles. One should be a silent witness and rejoice in the mystery of the Lord. Everybody gets what he actually deserves – nothing more, nothing less. The divine law is altogether different from man-made law. The law, verdict and judgement of the Lord is final and unquestionable; there is no bribing business there. His law is always impartial and uniform with the whole of mankind and within the whole of creation.

From the cradle to the grave, the guiding factor should be self-effort, and self-effort alone, which is based on surrender, without minding the results. By working hard, one will reach the goal. One can also become a great saint, for whatever has been achieved by one person can be achieved by others also. This is the Law.

Aspiration on the mundane side is but an expression of egoism that bursts forth in every moment of one's life through actions, thoughts and speech. Unless it is willed by the Lord, nothing mundane or spiritual can be attained by any human being on earth. Without the Lord's special grace, no one can make or mar himself. Whether one experiences failure or success in any work undertaken, it is the effect of the Lord's grace and will alone.

The Lord's grace descends when there is sincere devotion and when one does purushartha. Purushartha is possible

when the mind is pure, and the mind becomes pure when one does acts of kindness and charity. Grace descends only when there is purushartha. God and purushartha are synonymous terms. God actually helps those who help themselves, provided that the thing aspired for is in strict conformity with the injunctions of the holy writ.

What kind of effort should be made?

Swami Niranjanananda: There needs to be an effort, a sankalpa, to change one's life, to remove the defects and shortcomings and bring in excellence. Once excellence comes into life, once life is infused with positive qualities, positive thoughts, actions and behaviour, one becomes the recipient of God's grace.

People go to gurus, temples and religious places in the hope of finding grace. People pray to God to remove their suffering, but they don't find grace as they just expect miracles and are not willing to change their lives. However, nothing is achieved by praying unless the effort is made to bring a change into one's life. Until a change is brought about in behaviour, actions and thinking, do not expect to receive God's grace, for God helps those who help themselves. This is also Sri Krishna's advice to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:56):

*Sarvakarmaanyapi sadaa kurvaano madvyapaashrayah;
Matprasaadaadavaapnoti shaashvatam padamavyayam.*

Doing all actions always, taking refuge in Me, by My grace he obtains the eternal, indestructible state or abode.

The sages have also said to practise everything one wishes to practise. Whether it is praying in temples or performing other rituals, go ahead, but try to acquire excellence in the knowledge that is being received and learned. That is when the grace and compassion of God will be received, not otherwise.

Does God interfere in destiny?

Swami Satyananda: No. I used to think that destiny could be arrested by human effort, but now, gradually, as I am going deeper and deeper into it, I realize that destiny cannot be arrested or changed. Even God Himself does not interfere with it. There is a law unto everything. Flora and fauna, insects and worms, animals and human beings, planets and worlds are created according to its codes and I have not seen even the slightest variation or lapse in its operation. All phenomena – birth, death, karma, the sciences of alchemy, physics, chemistry and botany – show that these laws are accurate. The reactions are unfailingly predictable. The sun, moon and their eclipses all have laws. In my childhood and early days I thought that man could regulate the course of his life, that he could change his destiny, but today, when I think about life, I feel that destiny is truth and man must accept it.

Spiritual life is difficult. Few people can make it. If spiritual life were easy, thousands and thousands would have reached the pinnacle of spiritual life, but nobody has. Everybody should try on their own. Sometimes God will be gracious. Who knows? It is said in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Uttarakanda, doha 43):

*Sometimes God, out of mercy,
And without any reason for his affection,
Bestows a human body on someone.
The body of a man is like a ship,
Crossing the ocean of the world,
And the grace of God becomes a favourable wind.*

A thorn has to be removed by a thorn. If a thorn is lodged in the body, use another thorn to remove it. In the same way, remove rubbish with rubbish. One may ask the guru or somebody else to remove one's rubbish but, in this way, one is only adding more to the rubbish bin, which is why it is always full. When God's grace is there, all the rubbish of life is removed instantly, just as sheets and sheets of darkness are removed by the first rays of the sun.

Therefore, leave it to God. Try to attain His grace through prayer, remembrance and satsang. The first sadhana is satsang, where there is talk about God, about spiritual life or the singing of bhajan and kirtan. This helps to purify the inner environment. Satsang must be compatible with the inner environment. Nothing happens without God's grace. Whatever I received was through God's grace, not my own. God's grace is required. One needs His grace, and in order to receive His grace, one has to be innocent, like a child.



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BHAGAVAD GITA

1. Understanding Death

(2:22) Just as a man casts off worn-out clothes and puts on new ones, so also the embodied Self casts off worn-out bodies and enters others that are new. 7

(2:13) Just as the embodied soul passes into childhood, youth and old age in this body, so also does he pass into another body; the firm do not grieve over that. 14

(2:11) You have grieved for those that should not be grieved for; yet you speak words of wisdom. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead. 14

(2:24) This Self cannot be cut, burnt, wetted or dried up. It is eternal, all-pervading, stable, ancient and immovable. 14

(2:25) This Self is said to be unmanifested, unthinkable and unchangeable. Therefore, knowing this to be such, you should not grieve. 16-17

(2:26) But, even if you think of it as being constantly born and dying, even then, O mighty-armed, you should not grieve! 16-17

(2:27) For, certain is death for the born and certain is birth for the dead; therefore, over the inevitable you should not grieve. 16-17

(2:28) Beings are unmanifested in their beginning, manifested in their middle state, O Arjuna, and unmanifested again in their end! What is there to grieve about? 16-17

(2:30) This indweller in the body of everyone is always indestructible, O Arjuna! Therefore, you should not grieve for any creature. 18

2. Time Of Transition

(14:14) When a man dies during the preponderance of sattwa, he obtains the spotless worlds attained by knowers of the Highest. 31-32

(14:15) Dying when rajas predominates, he is born among those attached to action, and dying in tamas he is reborn in the womb of the senseless. 32

- (8:14) Whoever thinks of Me constantly and intensely with a one-pointed mind, to such steadfast yogis, I am easily attainable. 36
- (8:15) Having thus reached Me and merged in Me, they are not born again in the fleeting world of woe and misery. O Arjuna. 36
- (8:6) At the end whosoever leaves the body, thinking of any being, to that being only does he go, O son of Kunti, because of his constant thought of that being! 37
- (8:2) And how, at the time of death, are You to be known by the self-controlled one? 38
- (8:8) With the mind made steadfast by the yoga of constant practice, not moving towards any other thing and constantly meditating, one goes to the supreme person, the resplendent, O Arjuna! 38
- (8:5) And whosoever, leaving the body, goes forth remembering Me alone at the time of death, he attains My Being; there is no doubt about this. 39
- (8:9) Whosoever meditates on the Omniscient, the Ancient, the Ruler of the whole world, minuter than an atom, the Supporter of all, of inconceivable form, effulgent like the sun and beyond the darkness of ignorance, 39
- (8:10) At the time of death, with unshaken mind, endowed with devotion and by the power of yoga, fixing the whole life-breath in the middle of the two eyebrows, he reaches that resplendent Supreme Person. 39
- (8:11) That which is declared imperishable by those who know the Vedas, that which the self-controlled ascetics and passion-free enter, that desiring which celibacy is practised – that goal I will declare to you in brief. 39–40
- (8:12) Having closed all the gates, confined the mind in the heart and fixed the life-breath in the head, engaged in the practice of concentration, 39–40
- (8:13) Uttering the monosyllable Om – the Brahman – remembering Me always, he who departs thus, leaving the body, attains to the supreme goal. 39–40

3. After Death

(9:20) The knowers of the three Vedas, the drinkers of soma, purified of all sins, worshipping Me by sacrifices, pray for the way to heaven. They reach the holy world of the Lord of the gods and enjoy in heaven the divine pleasures of the gods. 53

(9:21) They, having enjoyed the vast heaven, enter the world of mortals when their merits are exhausted; thus abiding by the injunctions of the three Vedas and desiring objects of desires, they attain the state of going and returning. 53–54

(8:16) While all the worlds created by Brahma are limited by time and have their moment of dissolution, on reaching Me, there is no rebirth. 62

(8:24) Fire, light, daytime, the bright fortnight, the six months of the northern path of the sun – from spring equinox to autumn equinox – departing then these men who know Brahman go to Brahman. 79

(8:25) Attaining to the lunar light by smoke, night-time, the dark fortnight or the six months of the southern path of the sun – from autumn equinox to spring equinox – the yogi returns. 79–80

(8:26) The bright and the dark paths of the world are verily thought to be eternal; by the one – the bright path – a person goes not to return again, and by the other – the dark path – he returns. 80

4. Reincarnation

(8:19) This same multitude of beings, born again and again, is dissolved, helplessly, O Arjuna, into the unmanifest at the coming of the night, and comes forth at the coming of the day! 96

(13:21) The soul seated in nature experiences the qualities born of nature; attachment to the qualities is the cause of his birth in good and evil wombs. 98

(4:5) Arjuna, you and I have passed through many births, I remember them all. You do not remember, O chastiser of foes. 102

- (6:37) O Krishna, he who is unable to control himself although he has faith, and whose mind wanders away from yoga, what end does he meet, having failed to attain perfection in yoga? 121
- (6:41) Having attained to the worlds of the righteous and, having dwelt there for everlasting years, he who fell from yoga is reborn in the house of the pure and wealthy. 121
- (6:42) Or he is born in a family of wise yogis; but a birth like this is very difficult to obtain in this world. 121
- (6:43) There he comes in touch with the knowledge acquired in his former body and strives more than before for perfection, O Arjuna! 121
- (8:27) Knowing these paths, O Arjuna, no yogi is deluded! Therefore, at all times be steadfast in yoga. 123

5. Liberation

- (7:19) At the end of many births the wise man comes to Me, realizing that all this is the innermost self, Vasudeva. Such a great soul is very hard to find. 128
- (5:25) Those sages obtain absolute freedom or moksha whose sins have been destroyed, whose perception of duality has been torn asunder, who are self-controlled, and intent on the welfare of all beings. 131
- (6:29) With the mind harmonized by yoga, he sees the self abiding in all beings and all beings in the self; he sees the same everywhere. 131
- (13:29) He sees who sees that all actions are performed by nature, prakriti, alone and that the Self is actionless. 132
- (7:3) Among thousands of men, one perchance strives for perfection; even among those successful strivers, only one perchance knows Me in essence. 134
- (4:21) Without hope and with the mind and the self controlled, having abandoned all greed, doing mere bodily action, he incurs no sin. 137
- (4:37) As the blazing fire reduces fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, so does the fire of knowledge reduce all actions to ashes! 139

(2:46) To the Brahmana who has known the Self, all the Vedas are of as much use as is a reservoir of water in a place where there is a flood. 140

(13:27) He sees, who sees the Supreme Lord, existing equally in all beings, the unperishing within the perishing. 140

(5:17) Their intellect absorbed in That, their self being That; established in That, with That as their supreme goal, they go whence there is no return, their sins dispelled by knowledge. 140–141

6. Human Effort and Divine Grace

(3:5) Nor can anyone, even for an instant, remain actionless, for everyone is helplessly driven to action by the qualities, or gunas, born of nature. 151

(6:45) But, the yogi who strives with assiduity, purified of sins and perfected, gradually reaches the highest goal through many births. 154

(18:61) The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, causing them to revolve by His illusive power, as if mounted on a machine! 164

(6:35) Undoubtedly, O mighty-armed Arjuna, the mind is difficult to control and restless; but it may be restrained by practice and dispassion. 166

(18:56) Doing all actions always, taking refuge in Me, by My grace he obtains the eternal, indestructible state or abode. 169

MANUSMRITI

6. Human Effort and Divine Grace

(7:205) Success in every undertaking depends on destiny and man combined. The acts of destiny are out of the control of man. Think not of destiny, but act yourself.” 152

RAMACHARITAMANAS OF TULSIDAS

6. Human Effort and Divine Grace

(Uttarakanda, doha 43)

Sometimes God, out of mercy,
And without any reason for his affection,
Bestows a human body on someone.
The body of a man is like a ship,
Crossing the ocean of the world,
And the grace of God becomes a favourable wind. 170

RAMAYANA OF SAGE VALMIKI

Introduction

(Ayodhyakanda, 23:16) He who is cowardly and powerless
trusts in fate. The valiant, who are possessed of a strong
mind, never seek shelter in fate. 4

6. Human Effort and Divine Grace

(Kishkindhakanda, 1:121) Strenuous effort alone is
powerful, O worthy sir! There is no might greater than
exertion. Indeed nothing whatsoever is difficult to attain
in all the worlds for a man given to endeavour. 146

(Ayodhyakanda, 23:16) He who is cowardly and powerless
trusts in fate. The valiant, who are possessed of a strong
mind, never seek shelter in fate. 149

(Ayodhyakanda, 23:17) A man who is capable of setting
aside the decree of fate through personal effort never feels
disheartened on his purpose being thwarted by destiny. 149

YOGA SUTRAS OF SAGE PATANJALI

4. Reincarnation

(3:18) By direct perception of the impressions, knowledge
of previous births arises. 101

YOGA VASISHTHA OF SAGE VASISHTHA

3. After Death

(6(2):59:35) There are endless varieties of creations in the unbounded womb of vacuum, all of different natures and manners; and there are no two things of the same character and feature. 70

4. Reincarnation

(3:40:38) The living soul retains its consciousness within itself after its pangs of death are over, but remains in a state of insensibility by virtue of its own nature, called pradhana. 85

(5:6:4) Some men who are fast bound to the chain of their desires, and have to feel the consequences of their acts, are made to descend to the state of vegetables from their brutal life, or to rise from it to animal life again. 108

(5:6:8) The merit of prior acts follows one in his next state, and the learning of the past life meets a man in his next birth. 114

6. Human Effort and Divine Grace

(6(2):157:28) There is nothing in all these three worlds which is hard to be acquired by means of earnest endeavour and intense application. 146

Glossary

Abhinivesha – fear of death; one of the five kleshas described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras*. See Klesha.

Abhokta – non-enjoyer.

Abhyasa – constant and steady practice without any interruption and performed with an attitude of reverence; to remain established in the effort of sadhana.

Adharma – disharmony; not fulfilling one's natural role in life; unrighteousness.

Advaita – non-duality.

Agni – fire; the god of fire.

Ahamkara – faculty of ego, awareness of the existence of 'I'.

Ajna chakra – psychic/pranic centre situated at the medulla oblongata at the top of the spinal column in the mid-brain; seat of intuition, higher knowledge; third eye. See Chakra.

Ajnana – ignorance of reality; non-cognizance; unawareness; one of the five kleshas described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras*. See Klesha.

Anahata chakra – psychic/pranic centre situated in the spine behind the sternum; associated physically with the cardiac plexus, heart and lungs, mentally with emotion, especially love, and spiritually with atma, the spirit. See Chakra.

Ananda – pure bliss; natural state of consciousness.

Anandamaya kosha – sheath or body of bliss; the innermost wrapper or sheath of the embodied spirit. See Kosha.

Andha tamisra – a hell; literally, ‘deep darkness’. See Loka.

Annamaya kosha – sheath or body of matter; the sphere of existence created by food, maintained by food and which ultimately becomes food, i.e. the body. See Kosha.

Anugraha – divine grace, kindness, assistance.

Anushthana – a resolve to perform a sadhana, often mantra sadhana, with absolute discipline for a requisite period of time; a fixed course of sadhana.

Arjuna – name of the third Pandava brother, who was the son of Lord Indra and Kunti. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, he received a divine revelation from Sri Krishna.

Ashubha vasana – inauspicious, unholy desire; impure passion.

Asmi – I am, I exist.

Asmita – notion of ‘I’ or ‘I-ness’; awareness of ‘I am’ superimposed on the body, action and mind; the feeling of ‘I’ identified with an action; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*. See Klesha.

Asurya loka – sunless world; hell.

Atithi yajna – the practice of feeding a stranger or unknown guest; one of the five daily sacrifices to be performed by a householder. See Pancha maha yajna.

Atma, atman – the self beyond mind and body; principle of life; highest reality, Supreme Consciousness, spirit, soul.

Atma bala – strong will; strength or power of atman, the self.

Atma swarajya – liberation of the soul.

Atmajnana – direct knowledge of the self.

Aum – the universal cosmic mantra representing the four states of consciousness; the sound indicating the Supreme sublime reality or Brahman; conveys concepts of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence.

Avidya – ignorance of reality; ignorance. See Klesha.

Bhagavad Gita – literally, ‘divine song’; Sri Krishna’s discourse to his disciple Arjuna delivered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the commencement of the great Mahabharata

war; one of the source books of Hindu philosophy, containing the essence of the Upanishads and yoga.

Bhajan – devotional song.

Bhakta – devotee.

Bhakti – complete devotion to the higher reality of life; love for all beings; devotion as service; channelling of emotion to a higher force.

Bhava – feeling; condition; attitude; inclination or disposition of mind.

Bhaya – second instinct; fear; fear of death, fear of losing one's identity and associations.

Bhikshu – beggar.

Bhoota yajna – an oblation or offering to all created beings; one of the five daily sacrifices to be performed by a householder. See Pancha maha yajna.

Bija – seed; seed state; source, origin.

Brahma loka – world of Brahman; also called Hiranyagarbha, satya loka or Parabrahman. See Loka.

Brahma vidya – science of the Self; knowledge of Brahman, the Supreme Existence.

Brahman – etymologically 'ever expanding, limitless consciousness'; name of Supreme Consciousness or cosmic intelligence according to Vedanta philosophy; God as creator; monistic concept of Absolute Reality.

Brahmarandhra – crown of the head; the fontanelle; opening in the crown of the head through which the soul is said to escape on leaving the body.

Buddha – the enlightened one; generally referring to the founder of Buddhism.

Buddhi – discerning, discriminating aspect of mind; aspect of mind closest to pure consciousness; one of the four parts of the antahkarana, or inner instrument.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu – (1486–1534) an inspired bhakta from Bengal.

Chakra – circle, wheel or vortex; pranic/psychic centre; confluence point of energy flows (nadis) in the body; the seven major chakras for descent of divine energy or for

human evolution are sahasrara, ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana and mooladhara.

Chandra loka – heaven of the forefathers, also called Pitri loka.

Charvaka – a system of Indian philosophy that accepts only perceivable phenomena as valid; a materialistic philosopher said to have been a pupil of Brihaspati, the guru of the gods; hedonism.

Chinavrat bridge – the Parsi name for the borderland between embodied and disembodied life. See Vaitrani.

Chinta – thinking, thought; worry, care, anxiety.

Chitta – individual consciousness, including the subconscious and the unconscious layers of mind; thinking, concentration, attention, enquiry; storehouse of memory or samskaras; one of the four parts of the antahkarana, or inner instrument.

Chutia – tuft of hair worn at the back of the head.

Daru – wood.

Darvyoshit – wooden doll; puppet.

Dakshinayana – southern ‘path’ of the sun when, due to the tilt of the earth and its elliptical orbit, the sun appears to move south towards the Tropic of Capricorn. The six months of this southern journey are from mid-July to mid-January. It is believed that those who die during this periods will be reborn to this earth. This path is also called pitriyana and dhumamarga.

Deha buddhi – the images and impressions which hold the physical body together in order for it to fulfil its span of life, even after consciousness is liberated due to contemplation and meditation; awareness of the body.

Deva yajna – a sacrifice to the superior gods made by oblations to fire; one of the five daily sacrifices to be performed by a householder. See Pancha maha yajna.

Devayana – the path of the gods; the path of light that can be taken by the spirit after leaving the physical body. See Uttarayana.

- Dharana** – practice of concentration or complete attention; sixth stage of ashtanga yoga described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as holding or binding the mind to one point.
- Dharma** – the natural role we play in life; ethical law; duty; the laws or fundamental support of life; righteousness.
- Dharmashala** – a resting place provided free of cost and managed by a charitable institution (i.e. not a hotel).
- Dhumra** – smoke.
- Digambara** – literally, 'sky-clad'; naked; a state or discipline relating to those who are established beyond body consciousness. See Jaina. See Paramahansa.
- Divya chakshu** – divine eye, associated with the third eye or the eye of Shiva.
- Dwesha** – repulsion, aversion; hatred, enmity, dislike; one of the five causes of suffering (kleshas) described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as aversion to the unpleasant. See Klesha.
- Garuda Purana** – one of eighteen ancient sacred texts believed to be composed by Rishi Veda Vyasa. Garuda is an eagle and the vehicle of Lord Vishnu.
- Gati** – moving; course, way; mode of existence; experiences of movements.
- Go** – organ of sense; indriya.
- Gosain** – another name for Govinda, Sri Krishna, who controls or enchants the mind and senses; the master of the indriyas.
- Govinda** – name of Sri Krishna who controls or enchants the mind and senses.
- Guna** – quality; the three gunas, qualities or aspects of prakriti are sattwa, rajas and tamas.
- Guru** – one who dispels the darkness caused by ignorance (avidya); teacher of the science of ultimate reality who by the light of his own atma can dispel darkness, ignorance and illusion from the mind and enlighten the consciousness of a devotee/disciple; preceptor.
- Guru kripa** – grace of guru.

Guru poornima – holy day for worship of the guru or spiritual teacher when the disciple receives blessings from the guru. It is celebrated on the full moon of the lunar month Ashada which corresponds to July in the Gregorian calendar.

Havan – fire ritual.

Hiranyagarbha – cosmic mind or subtle body; Brahman; golden seed of the unity of life; it is said that Brahman alone is creating himself from his own substance.

Hrishikesh – the Lord of the indriyas, of the senses, the inner Lord in one's heart.

Indriya – sense organ; power of the senses.

Ishtapurtam – performance of sacrifices and charitable deeds, with unselfish motives, for the benefit of humanity.

Ishwara – higher reality; God; non-changing, indestructible principle or quality. See Nashwara.

Jaina – Indian religion noted for strict adherence to non-violence. See Digambara.

Janah loka – plane of existence of rishis and munis. See Loka.

Janma – birth; origin, creation.

Japa – a meditation practice involving repetition of a mantra.

Japa yoga – yoga of mantra repetition; system of union with the highest through repetition of a mantra or rotation of consciousness.

Jiva – principle of life; individual or personal soul; living being.

Jivanmukta – liberated in life; an enlightened person, a person purified by true knowledge of the Supreme Reality and freed from future births while still embodied.

Jivanmukti – final liberation in the present state of life.

Jivatma, jivatman – individual or personal soul.

Jivatma bhava – the ego, the individual principle.

Jnana, jnanam – knowledge, cognition, wisdom; higher knowledge derived from meditation or from inner experience.

Jyoti – a small flame; light, brightness; fire.

Kabir Das – (1440–1518) poet and mystic, his teachings blend Hinduism, Sufism and Bhakti.

Kal – time; sometimes used as a name of the Lord of Death or Shiva in his aspect as destroyer.

Kalpa vriksha – wish-fulfilling tree; a psychic centre closely linked with anahata chakra.

Kama – emotional, sensual love; lust.

Kamya karma – karma done with desire.

Kapila, Sage – name of the sage who founded the Samkhya philosophy.

Karana sharira – causal body; also called anandamaya kosha.

Karma – action and result; law of cause and effect.

Karma bhoomi – land of action; the earthly plane.

Karma kanda – the part of the Vedas that relates to sacrificial rules and ceremonial acts on the physical level.

Kirtan – singing of God's name; practice in which a group of people sing a collection of mantras.

Klesha – pain, affliction, suffering; five afflictions or causes of suffering described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, viz. ignorance (avidya), sense of "I" identity (asmita), attraction (raga), aversion (dwesha), and fear of death (abhinivesha); in yoga the five kleshas are the sources of all suffering or troubles, with ignorance being considered the chief klesha.

Kosha – sheath or body; a dimension of experience and existence.

Kriya yoga – practices of kundalini yoga designed to speed the evolution of humanity.

Kriyamana karma – karma being performed now; the effects of the deeds of the present life which are to be experienced in the future; literally, 'which is being done'; also called agami karma.

Kumbhipaka – a hell. See Loka.

Kundalini – the evolutionary energy in a human being; spiritual energy; Devi described as the potential energy of a human being dormant in mooladhara chakra, which, when

awakened, awakens the chakras, resulting in progressive enlightenment.

Kurukshetra – scene of the epic battle recorded in the *Mahabharata*.

Lakshman – a hero of the epic *Ramayana*, brother of Sri Rama.

Loka – locationless dimension; plane of existence, dimension.

Mahabharata – epic of ancient India said to be composed by Sage Veda Vyasa, involving the history and consequences of the great battle between the Kaurava and Pandava princes. It consists of eighteen sections and the *Bhagavad Gita* is a part of it.

Mahabhoota - the five elements (space, air, fire, water and earth).

Mahah loka – one of the seven higher dimensions of consciousness; plane of saints and siddhas. See Loka.

Mahakal – endless time; Shiva in his aspect as destroyer.

Mahamrityunjaya mantra – the ‘great victory over death’ mantra, used to avoid calamities, for overcoming the fear of death.

Maharaurava – very painful and dirty; a hell. See Loka.

Mahasamadhi – final liberation experienced on the departure of the spirit from the body.

Maithuna – physical union; the first basic instinct; copulation; fusion of male and female energies.

Manipura chakra – literally, ‘city of jewels’; psychic/pranic centre situated in the spine behind the navel; associated with the solar plexus and digestive organs and mentally with willpower; source of vitality and energy. See Chakra.

Manomaya kosha – mental sheath or body; mental sphere of life and awareness. See Kosha.

Mantra shastra – scriptures on mantra.

Manusmriti – a highly respected book on dharma shastra (code of conduct), indicating one’s duty to self and society and defining the purushartha; compiled by Rishi Bhṛigu, believed to be a disciple of Manu; literally, ‘a text based on memories of the teachings of Manu’.

Markandeya, Sage – a Rishi devoted to Devi.

Maya – means by which Brahman creates the phenomenal world; power of creation; illusive power; in Vedanta philosophy, the two powers of maya are: 1. the power of veiling, and 2. the power of projection; in Samkhya philosophy, another name for Prakriti.

Mirabai – (born 1502) Indian poet saint devoted to Sri Krishna.

Moksha – liberation from the cycles of birth and death and the illusion of maya.

Mooladhara chakra – the lowest psychic/pranic centre in the human body; situated in the perineal floor in men and the cervix in women; associated physically with the coccygeal plexus, excretory and reproductive organs, and mentally with the instinctive nature; spiritually it is the seat of kundalini. See Chakra. See Kundalini. See Loka.

Mukta – free, liberated.

Nashwara – the decaying principle described in Samkhya philosophy; manifest existence; changeable. See Ishwara.

Nidra – fourth instinct; deep sleep; isolation from the mind and senses; disassociation.

Nivartaka – who returns.

Nivartan – the return journey to earth after death; pratyahara.

Padartha – substance, material, matter.

Pancha maha yajna – literally, ‘the five great sacrifices’, the acts of piety to be performed daily by every householder; see Deva yajna, Rishi yajna, Pitri yajna, Bhoota yajna, Atithi yajna.

Pandavas – sons of Pandu: Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Sahadev and Nakula; the five brothers who held an inter-family feud against the Kauravas as recorded in the *Mahabharata* epic. See Mahabharata. See Sri Krishna.

Para vairagya – absence of attachment in any form; highest type or state of dispassion (vairagya); the mind turns away completely from worldly objects and the gunas of Prakriti due to identification with Purusha.

Parabrahman – Absolute, Supreme Reality.

Paramahansa – literally, ‘beyond the swan’ (which has the legendary ability to distil reality from unreality); a sannyasin established in Brahma vidya. See Digambara.

Paramatma – cosmic Soul or Consciousness; Supreme Self; the atma of the entire universe; God.

Parvati – goddess and consort of Shiva, mother of Ganesha and Kartikeya.

Patanjali, Sage – author of the *Yoga Sutras*; an ancient rishi who codified the system of raja yoga including ashtanga yoga.

Pitri – ancestor; a divine hierarchy consisting of deceased progenitors and ancestors.

Pitri loka – the heaven of the forefathers, also called Chandra loka. See Loka.

Pitri yajna – oblations for gratifying the manes (deceased ancestors); one of the five daily sacrifices to be performed by a householder. See Pancha maha yajna.

Pitriyana – the path of the forefathers.

Poorna paramatma – God.

Pradhana – the root base for all elements; undifferentiated matter; in Samkhya philosophy, another name for Prakriti.

Prakriti – nature; manifested shakti; manifest and unmanifest nature composed of the three gunas; counterpart of purusha in Samkhya philosophy.

Prana shakti – energy; dynamic solar force governing the dimension of matter; energy flow related to externalization of mind; the force of prana.

Prana vidya – knowledge and control of prana; a healing technique involving awareness and movement of prana.

Pranamaya kosha – energy sheath, or vital pranic body; the sheath covering the self which is composed of pranic vibration and the rhythm of pranic forces. See Kosha.

Prarabdha karma – actions already performed which, like arrows shot from the bow, cannot be retrieved; previous karmas which have matured enough to give fruit; that

portion of one's actions which is bound to fructify in the present life and cannot be averted.

Pratyahara – restraining the sensory and motor organs; withdrawal and emancipation of the mind from the domination of the senses and sensual objects; training the senses to follow the mind within; fifth stage of ashtanga yoga described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*.

Preta loka – an astral world of gross density; loka of ghosts. See Loka.

Preya marga – the path of sensorial enjoyment.

Punar janma – rebirth.

Puranas – eighteen ancient texts containing the earliest mythology of the tantric and vedic traditions, consisting of legends and mythological narrations dealing with creation, recreation and the genealogies of sages and rulers.

Rabindranath Tagore – (1861–1914) Indian poet and philosopher, founder of Shanti Niketan, West Bengal, which offers model of high quality education.

Raga – passion; affection; attachment; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as attraction or attachment to what gives pleasure. See Klesha.

Raja yoga – the supreme yoga; union through control of the mental processes and concentration of the mind; the most authoritative text is Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* which contain ashtanga yoga, the eightfold path.

Rajas – one of the three gunas or attributes; dynamism; state of activity; creativity combined with full ego involvement. See Guna.

Rama Tirtha – (1873–1906) Indian saint; Vedantin; strongly influenced by Swami Vivekananda.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa – (1836–1886) Indian saint and mystic who perfected sadhanas from all religions; guru of Swami Vivekananda.

Ramayana – one of the most famous ancient Indian epics, relating the life of Sri Rama, the most widely known version

was composed by Sage Valmiki, containing about 24,000 verses in seven chapters.

Ratnakar – the former name of Sage Valmiki.

Ratri – night.

Raurava – a hell. See Loka.

Rig Veda – the oldest of the four Vedas, the most ancient sacred books of the eternal dharma. It contains hymns to the deities or guardians of the law, such as Agni, Varuna, Indra and Mitra and presents nature as a living force working in the interests of humanity.

Rishi yajna – study of the scriptures for gratifying the seers of truth; one of the five daily sacrifices to be performed by a householder. See Pancha maha yajna.

Sadhaka – one who practises sadhana; a spiritual aspirant

Sadhana – spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly.

Sadhu – good or holy person, sage, saint.

Sahasrara chakra – ‘thousand petalled lotus;’ abode of Shiva or superconsciousness; highest chakra or psychic centre, it symbolizes the threshold between the psychic and spiritual realms and is located at the crown of the head. See Chakra.

Sai – Supreme Divine Being.

Sakshi – that which observes the phenomenal reality without being affected at all; witness.

Samsara – illusory world, the course or circuit of worldly life; unending cycle of birth and death.

Samskara – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype; the impressions which condition one’s nature, causing one to react or respond in a certain way.

Samskara pravaha – the flow of samskaras; the flow of evolution.

Samyama, sanyam – restraint, self-discipline; harmonious control of concentration (dharana), meditation (dhyana) and samadhi fused into one process.

Sanchita karma – stored karma; accumulated experiences and involvement in life which have been registered by the

consciousness and although not influencing one's life at the moment, will manifest in the future.

Sanjay – the clairvoyant charioteer who reports the discussion between Sri Krishna and Arjuna to the blind King Dhritarashtra in the form of the *Bhagavad Gita*. See Sri Krishna. See Mahabharata.

Sankalpa – positive resolve; purpose, aim, intention; will-power.

Sannyasa – dedication; complete renunciation of the world, its possessions and attachments; abandonment of the phenomenal world.

Satchidananda – literally, 'truth-consciousness-bliss'; the nature of Supreme Consciousness.

Sattwa – one of the three gunas, or attributes of nature; state of luminosity, harmony, equilibrium and purity. See Guna.

Satya loka – the highest of the seven higher dimensions of consciousness. See Loka.

Savitri – a woman who became a symbol of faithfulness; wife of Satyavan, who was destined to die in a year from the date of marriage. However, due to Savitri's steadfast and undaunted devotion, Yama, the god of death, relented and restored the spirit of Satyavan to her.

Shadsampatti – one of the four necessary qualifications for a serious spiritual aspirant according to *Aparokshanubhuti* of Adi Shankaracharya. Literally, 'sixfold virtues': equanimity (sama), self-control (dama), sensory withdrawal (uparati), endurance (titiksha), faith (shraddha), constant concentration on reality (samadhana).

Shakti – primal energy; manifest consciousness; power, ability, capacity, strength, energy; counterpart of Shiva; the moving power of nature and consciousness; in Hindu mythology Shakti is often symbolized as a divine woman.

Shankaracharya, Adi – the name of a celebrated teacher of Advaita Vedanta philosophy, he was an enlightened sage who is said to have established the Dashnami order of sannyasa and authored a large number of scriptural works.

Shastra – an authoritative treatise on any subject, particularly science and religion; sacred book.

Shiva – state of pure consciousness, individual and cosmic, original source of yoga; Lord of yogis; auspicious, benevolent one; name of the god of the Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the work of destruction; destroyer of the ego and duality.

Shiva Purana – collection of six ancient scriptures that tell the story of Shiva. See Purana.

Shoonya – void, state of transcendental consciousness; space behind the eyebrow centre.

Shraaddha – commemorative religious rite; funeral rite or ceremony performed in honour of the departed souls of relatives.

Shraddha – trust, faith, belief; religious faith; sedateness, composure of mind.

Shreya marga – literally, the best path; the path of righteousness.

Shubha vasana – auspicious, holy desire.

Shukla – white.

Shvetashvatara Upanishad – one of the Upanishads. See Upanishads.

Shuchi – holy; clean.

Sirat – name for the borderland between embodied and disembodied life in Islam. It is also known as Chinavat bridge by the Parsis, and Vaitrani by the Hindus.

Sivaratri – 14th night of the dark lunar fortnight in the month of Phalguna (which falls in February or March) on which traditionally a rigorous fast is kept followed by a cool drink of spiced milk and bhang; observed in honour of the marriage of Shiva and Shakti.

Smriti – memory; a class of texts called dharma shastra handed down by tradition.

Sri Krishna – literally, ‘black’ or ‘dark’; eighth incarnation of Vishnu; avatara who descended in the Dwapara Yuga. Sri Krishna is perhaps the most celebrated hero in Hindu mythology and seems to be an historical figure. To

uphold dharma he orchestrated the Mahabharata war. His teachings to his friend and disciple Arjuna during that war are immortalized in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Sri mataam – good qualities.

Sri Rama – the seventh avatara of Vishnu and embodiment of dharma, hero of the epic Ramayana; a heroic and virtuous king.

Srimad Bhagavata – one of the eighteen major Puranas. Dealing with the avataras of Vishnu, it speaks in great detail about the life of Sri Krishna. See Purana.

Sruti – the Vedas (created through revelation which was heard); literally, ‘what has been heard’.

Sthoola sharira – gross, physical body; annamaya kosha.

Sukshma – subtle; relating to the world of the psyche.

Sukshma bhoota –subtle essence of the elements. See Mahabhoota. See Tanmatra.

Sukshma sharira – subtle body composed of pranamaya, manomaya and vijñanamaya koshas; part of the sub-conscious which manifests in the dream state.

Swadhisthana chakra – literally, ‘one’s own abode’; second psychic/pranic centre; located in the coccyx; associated with the sacral plexus and governing the urogenital system; the storehouse of subconscious impressions. See Chakra.

Swadhyaya – self-observation, self-study, continuous conscious awareness of what one is doing; study of the scriptures; one of the niyamas recommended in Sage Patangali’s *Yoga Sutras*.

Swami – literally, ‘master over the mind’; master of the self; title of sannyasins.

Swarga – heaven, Lord Indra’s paradise. See Loka.

Tamas – one of the three gunas or attributes of nature; inertia, stability; ignorance, darkness; unwillingness to change. See Guna.

Tamisra – a hell. See Loka.

Tanmatra – subtle nature; quality or essence of the elements and the associated five senses. In Yoga philosophy the

five tanmatras are the faculties of hearing, touch, seeing, tasting and smelling.

Tantra – most ancient universal science and culture which deals with the transition of human nature from the present level of evolution and understanding to a transcendental level of knowledge, experience and awareness; a particular path of sadhana including mantra, yantra and other esoteric practices.

Tantra shastras – scriptures especially relevant to the fourth or present age (kali yuga) cast in the form of a dialogue between Shiva and his female consort Shakti or Parvati.

Tapah loka – one of the higher worlds just below satya loka; one of the seven higher dimensions of consciousness. See Loka.

Tarpan – rites performed for ancestors.

Tat tvam asi – literally, ‘That you are’ or ‘Thou art That’, one of the four great vedic statements; it is the instruction given by a self-realized sage to the disciple, that the real nature of the human soul or the individual soul (jiva) is identical with the Supreme Spirit pervading the universe (Brahman).

Tattwa – ‘that-ness’; true essential nature; an element, a primary substance; another name for mahabhoota.

Tejas – luminosity, aura, splendour; bright alertness; warmth, heat.

Tirtha – holy or sacred place, place of pilgrimage.

Trishna – temptation.

Tulsidas – the author of one of the versions of the famous epic called the *Ramacharitamanas*, which describes the life of Sri Rama. It is composed in poetic form and is chanted by devotees throughout India.

Uddalaka – a great rishi of ancient times.

Upanishads – the philosophical portion of the Vedas, traditionally one hundred and eight in number, containing intimate dialogues and discussions between guru and disciple on the nature of the Absolute and the path leading towards it; literally, ‘to sit near and listen’ (to the spiritual

teacher); regarded as the source of Vedanta, Yoga and Samkhya philosophies.

Uttarayana – ‘northern path’ of the sun which takes six months of the solar year. Dying during that period, people who know Brahman go to Brahman (and are freed from the cycle of life and death); the six months of this northern journey are from mid-January to mid-July. See Devayana.

Uttarkashi – pilgrim town in North India.

Vaikuntha – heaven; abode of Vishnu.

Vairagya – non-attachment; absence of sensual craving and desires; detachment; supreme dispassion.

Vaisheshika – one of the six principal systems of Indian philosophy.

Vaitarani – name for the narrow river of ether which is the borderland between embodied and disembodied life, according to the Hindus. It is also known as Chinavat bridge by the Parsis, and Sirat by the Muslims.

Valmiki, Sage – name of a celebrated sage who meditated for so long that he became interred in a termite mound. He was also author of the first *Ramayana*.

Varanasi – holy city connected especially with Lord Shiva, also known as Benares and Kashi.

Vasana – subtle impressions which are the seeds of desires.

Vasishtha, Sage – a celebrated rishi and seer of the Vedas; author of many vedic hymns. His teachings are recorded in *Yoga Vasishtha*, one of the greatest expositions of jnana yoga.

Vedantin – practitioner of Vedanta, a philosophy stating one non-dual eternal principle underlying and causing all creation.

Vedas – ancient texts revealed to the sages and saints of India, explaining and regulating every aspect of life from the Supreme Reality to worldly affairs; four in number: Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharva, which are further divided into the Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishads; the oldest books in the library of mankind, parts of them revealed to sages and seers before 5,000 BC.

Videhamukti – literally, ‘freedom from the body’, a state of realization or liberation (mukti) which is not usually experienced by anyone with sufficient karma to warrant their still inhabiting a body. In exceptional cases videhamukti is a state possible even with a body, but the body soon drops away.

Vidya – knowledge or science, particularly knowledge of spiritual truth and non-mundane reality.

Vijnanamaya kosha – astral or psychic (higher mental) sheath or body; one of the sheaths of the soul, consisting of the principle of intellect or buddhi, the subtler level of our own existence with its vision, intuition, wisdom and power of understanding; the covering of the self which is made of knowledge. See Kosha.

Vishnumriti – scriptures about Lord Vishnu; remembrance of Lord Vishnu.

Viveka – discrimination; right knowledge or understanding; sense of discrimination between the self and what is not the self, between the eternal and the transitory, between consciousness and unconsciousness, between prakriti and purusha.

Vivekananda, Swami – (1863–1903) disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa; he brought his guru’s teachings to the West.

Yajnavalkya, Sage – a rishi; guru of King Janaka, Sita’s father.

Yaksha – a ghost or spirit; a type of demi-god.

Yaksha Prashna – episode in the epic *Mahabharata* where a yaksha tests the understanding of the Pandava brothers.

Yama – name of the Lord of Death.

Yoga – union; the root is yuj, meaning ‘to join’, ‘to yoke’; a system of practice leading to a state of union between the individual and universal awareness; practices, philosophy and lifestyle to achieve peace, power and spiritual wisdom as well as perfect health, a sound mind and a balanced personality; one of the six main systems of Indian philosophy.

Yoga bhrashta – one who has practised yoga or spiritual life sincerely but falls from a high state of yoga for some reason.

Yoga Sutras – ancient authoritative text on raja yoga by Sage Patanjali.

Yoga Vasishtha – a monumental scripture on Vedanta in the form of a dialogue between Sri Rama and his guru Sage Vasishtha.

Yogananda, Paramahansa – (1893–1952) disciple of Sri Yukteshwar of Babaji's lineage whose task was to teach kriya yoga in the West.

Yogi – an adept of yoga; follower of the yoga system of philosophy and practice.

Yudhishtira – literally, 'firm in battle'; name of the eldest Pandava brother in the *Mahabharata* epic.

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